NICKY-NAN RESERVIST

THE DUCHY EDITION OF THE
TALES & ROMANCES OF
SIR ARTHUR
QUILLER-COUCH

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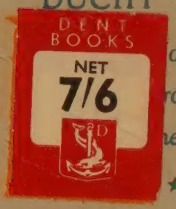
DUCHY EDITION



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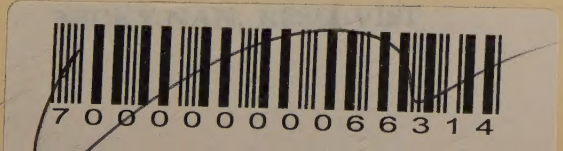

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DEAD MAN'S ROCK. A Romance
THE ASTONISHING HISTORY OF TROY TOWN
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NICKY-NAN RESERVIST

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

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PREFACE

My first and last object in adding a preface (or post-script) to this story, published in 1915, is to ask the reader to make such allowance as he can by setting the clock of his mind back to that dark time. It was written in the intervals of recruiting for a battalion of infantry, and it reflects the anger I must have shared with many at the cruel obstacles to persuasion put in our way by unthinking, and worse than unthinking, people.

In the remote corner of England where I live the Territorial movement had, by 1914, made fair progress in spite of hindrances by which their employers too often countered the young men's willingness. But in the agricultural areas the idea of War was a new thing, as the idea of any special enmity against Germany was a strange one, while that of a General Levy to meet an unrealised energy lay remoter yet and far beyond the countryside's horizon. The shock affected the fisher-folk in a different way, since our small coastal towns and villages were accustomed to sending their young men to be trained in the Royal Naval Reserve and helped to man the Navy itself in numbers that astonished anyone (say) who happened to stand upon Devonport platform on a Saturday afternoon and watch the west-ward trains as they pulled out, packed with bluejackets bound for home on week-end leave. Nothing could surpass the readiness, unless it were the cheerfulness, with which all the Reservists answered the instant call.

But just because of this, and because our shore-dwellers were used to the sight of small naval craft in flotillas or great battleships at speed-trial or gun-practice, to them War was a matter for the Navy, and professional. The Army seldom came within their ken, almost never within range of their domestic concern.

If the reader reflects on this, and further on the fact that our home keeping youngsters had been taught by Church and Chapel to regard War as anti-Christian, an evil thing, he will see that the task of recruiting in 1914-15 was a highly delicate one: that while in the Universities (for instance) fed by boys trained to an ideal of service the difficulty was to deal with rush of volunteers, along the countryside it was rather to awaken the sense of private duty in a national danger and (often) to contend with conscience.

Infinite damage, then, was done by the unhelpful who wrote hasty, scathing letters to the newspapers, accusing villages and districts of cowardice; infamous cruelty (as by confessions I know practised) by people who sent white feathers anonymously to young men already tortured by mental and moral doubts which had nothing to do with physical fear. It turned hundreds of high-spirited boys to sullenness and suspicion.

I can recognise, looking back, that a great deal of this cruelty had its root in panic — the panic of a non-belligerent few. But it did much harm at the time, and in the heat of resenting it I wrote this story.

Q.

January, 1929.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	How the Children Played	1
II.	Call to Arms	12
III.	How the Men Went	26
IV.	The First Sermon	37
V.	The Anonymous Letter	52
VI.	Treasure Trove	62
VII.	"Quid non Mortalia Pectora . . ."	76
VIII.	Business as Usual	88
IX.	The Broken Pane	99
X.	The Vicar's Misgivings	107
XI.	The "Three Pilchards"	119
XII.	First Attempt at Hiding	131
XIII.	First Aid	140
XIV.	Polsue *v.* Penhaligon, Nanjivell Intervening	154
XV.	The 'Taty-Patch	168
XVI.	Corporal Sandercock	178
XVII.	The Second Sermon	190
XVIII.	Feathers	201
XIX.	I-Spy-Hi!	210
XX.	Miss Oliver Proffers Assistance	223
XXI.	Fairy Gold	235
XXII.	Salvage	245
XXIII.	Enlightenment, and Recruiting	259
XXIV.	The First Three	277

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NICKY-NAN, RESERVIST

CHAPTER I

HOW THE CHILDREN PLAYED

WHEN news of the War first came to Polpier, Nicholas Nanjivell (commonly known as Nicky-Nan) paid small attention to it, being preoccupied with his own affairs.

Indeed, for some days the children knew more about it than he, being tragically concerned in it—poor mites! —though they took it gaily enough. For Polpier lives by the fishery, and of the fishermen a large number —some scores—had passed through the Navy and now belonged to the Reserve. These good fellows had the haziest notion of what newspapers meant by the Balance of Power in Europe, nor perhaps could any one of them have explained why, when Austria declared war on Servia, Germany should be taking a hand. But they had learnt enough on the lower deck to forebode that, when Germany took a hand, the British Navy would pretty soon be clearing for action. Consequently all through the last week of July, when the word "Germany" began to be printed in large type in Press headlines, the drifters putting out nightly on the watch for the pilchard harvest carried each a copy of *The Western Morning News* or *The Western Daily Mercury* to be read aloud, discussed, expounded under

the cuddy lamp in the long hours between shooting the nets and hauling them.

> When the corn is in the shock,
> Then the fish is on the rock.

A very little of the corn had been shocked as yet; but the fields, right down to the cliffs' edge, stood ripe for abundant harvest. I doubt, indeed, if in our time they have ever smiled a fairer promise of reward for husbandry than during this last fortnight of July 1914, when the crews, running back with the southerly breeze for Polpier, would note how the crop stood yellower in to-day's than in yesterday's sunrise, and speculate when Farmer Best or Farmer Bate meant to start reaping. As for the fish, the boats had made small catches—dips among the straggling advance-guards of the great armies of pilchards surely drawing in from the Atlantic. "'Tis early days yet, hows'ever—time enough, my sons—plenty time!" promised Un 'Benny Rowett, patriarch of the fishing-fleet and local preacher on Sundays. Some of the younger men grumbled that "there was no tellin': the season had been tricky from the start." The spider-crabs—that are the curse of inshore trammels—had lingered for a good three weeks past the date when by all rights they were due to sheer off. Then a host of spur-dogs had invaded the whiting-grounds, preying so gluttonously on the hooked fish that, haul in as you might, three times out of four the line brought up nothing but a head—all the rest bitten off and swallowed. "No salmon moving, over to Troy. The sean-boats there hadn't even troubled to take out a licence." As for lobsters, "they were becomin' a winter fish, somehow, and up the harbours

you started catchin' 'em at Christmas and lost 'em by Eastertide": while the ordinary crabbing-grounds appeared to be clean bewitched.

One theorist loudly called for a massacre of sea-birds, especially shags and gannets. Others (and these were the majority) demanded protection from steam trawlers, whom they accused of scraping the sea-bottom, to the wholesale sacrifice of immature fish—sole and plaice, brill and turbot.

"Now look 'ee here, my sons," said Un' Benny Rowett: "if I was you, I'd cry to the Lord a little more an' to County Council a little less. What's the full size ye reckon a school o' pilchards, now —one 'o the big uns. Scores and scores o' square miles, all movin' in a mass, an' solid a'most as sardines in a tin; and, as I've heard th' Old Doctor used to tell, every female capable o' spawnin' up to two million. . . . No; your mind can't seize it. But ye might be fitted to grasp that, if th' Almighty hadn' ordained other fish an' birds as well as us men to prey upon 'em, in five years' time no boat 'd be able to sail th' Atlantic; in ten years ye could walk over from Polpier to Newfoundland stankin' 'pon rotten pilchards all the way. Don't reckon yourselves wiser than Natur', my billies. . . . As for steam trawlin', simmee, I han't heard so much open grievin' over it since Government started loans for motors. Come to think—hey? —there ben't no such tearin' difference between motors an' steam—not on principle. And as for reggilations, I've a doo respect for County Council till it sets up to reggilate Providence, when I falls back on th' Lord's text to Noey that, boy an' man, I've never known fail. *While th' earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall*

not cease. And again," continued Un' Benny Rowett, "Behold, I say unto you, *Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.*"

If pressed in argument, he would entrench himself behind the wonderful plenty of John-doreys: "Which," he would say, "is the mysteriousest fish in the sea and the holiest. Take a John-dorey or two, and the pilchards be never far behind. 'Tis well beknown as the fish St. Peter took when Our Lord told 'en to cast a hook; an' be shot if he didn' come to hook with a piece o' silver in his mouth! You can see Peter's thumb-mark upon him to this day: and, if you ask *me,* he's better eatin' than a sole, let alone you can carve 'en with a spoon—though improved if stuffed, with a shreddin' o' mint. Iss, baked o' course. . . . Afore August is out—mark my words—the pilchards 'll be here."

"But shall *we* be here to take 'em?"

It was a dark, good-looking, serious youth who put the question: and all the men at the end of the quay turned to stare at him. (For this happened on the evening of Saturday, the 25th—St. James's Day,—when all the boats were laid up for the week-end.)

The men turned to young Seth Minards because, as a rule, he had a wonderful gift of silence. He was known to be something of a scholar, and religious too: but his religion did not declare itself outwardly, save perhaps in a constant gentleness of manner. The essence of it lay in spiritual withdrawal; the man retiring into his own heart, so to speak, and finding there a Friend with whom to hold sweet and habitual counsel. By consequence, young Seth Minards spoke rarely, but with more than a double weight.

"What mean ye, my son?" demanded Un' Benny. "Tell us—you that don't speak, as a rule, out of your turn."

"I think," answered Seth Minards slowly, "there is going to be War for certain—a great War—and in a few days."

Three days later the postmistress, Mrs. Pengelly (who kept a general shop), put out two newspaper placards which set all the children at the Council Schools, up the valley, playing at a game they called "English and Germans"—an adaptation of the old "Prisoners' Base." No one wanted to be a German: but, seeing that you cannot well conduct warfare without an enemy, the weaker boys represented the Teutonic cause under conscription, and afterwards joined in the cheers when it was vanquished.

The Schools broke up on the last day of July; and the contest next day became a naval one, among the row-boats lying inside the old pier. This was ten times better fun; for a good half of the boys meant to enter the Navy when they grew up. They knew what it meant, too. The great battleships from Plymouth ran their speed-trials off Polpier: the westward mile-mark stood on the Peak, right over the little haven; and the smallest child has learnt to tell a Dreadnought in the offing, or discern the difference between a first-class and a second-class cruiser. The older boys knew most of the ships by name.

Throughout Saturday the children were—as their mothers agreed—"fair out of hand." But this may have been because the mothers themselves were gossiping whilst their men slumbered. All Polpier women—

even the laziest—knit while they talk: and from nine o'clock onwards the alley-ways that pass for streets were filled with women knitting hard and talking at the top of their voices. The men and the cats dozed.

Down by the boats, up to noon the boys had things all their own way, vying in feats of valour. But soon after the dinner-hour the girls asserted themselves by starting an Ambulance Corps, and with details so realistic that not a few of the male combatants hauled out of battle on pretence of wounds and in search of better fun.

Nicholas Nanjivell, "mooning" by the bridge twelve paces from his door, sharpening his jack-knife upon a soft parapet-stone that was reported to bring cutlery to an incomparable edge and had paid for its reputation, being half worn away—Nicholas Nanjivell, leaning his weight on the parapet, to ease the pain in his leg—Nicholas Nanjivell, gloomily contemplating his knife and wishing he could plunge it into the heart of a man who stood behind a counter behind a door which stood in view beyond the bridge-end—Nicholas Nanjivell, nursing his own injury to the exclusion of any that might threaten Europe—glanced up and beheld his neighbour Penhaligon's children, Young 'Bert and 'Beida (Zobeida), approach by the street from the Quay bearing between them a stretcher, composed of two broken paddles and part of an old fishing-net, and on the stretcher, covered by a tattered pilot-jack, a small form—their brother 'Biades (Alcibiades), aged four. It gave him a scare.

"Lor sake!" said he, hastily shutting and pocketing his knife. "What you got there?"

"'Biades," answered 'Beida, with a tragical face.

"Han't I heard your mother warn 'ee a score o' times, against lettin' that cheeld play loose on the Quay! . . . What's happened to 'en? Broke his tender neck, I shouldn' wonder. . . . Here, let me have a look——"

"Broke his tender fiddle-stick!" 'Beida retorted. "He's bleedin' for his country, is 'Biades, if you really want to know; and if you was helpful you'd lend us that knife o' yours."

"What for, missy?"

"Why, to take off the injured limb. 'Bert's knife's no good since the fore-part o' the week, when he broke the blade prizin' up limpets an' never guessing how soon this War'd be upon us."

"I did," maintained 'Bert. "I was gettin' in food supplies."

"If I was you, my dears, I'd leave such unholy games alone," Nicky-Nan advised them. "No, and I'll not lend 'ee my knife, neither. You don't know what War is, children: an' please God you never will. War's not declared yet—not by England, anyway. Don't 'ee go to seek it out until it seeks *you*."

"But 'tis comin'," 'Beida persisted. "Father was talkin' with Mother last night: he didn' go out with the boats: and 'Bert and I both heard him say—didn' we, 'Bert?—'twas safe as to-morrow's sun. The way we heard was that Mother'd forgot to order us to bed; which hasn't happened not since Coronation Night an' the bonfire. When she came up to blow out the light she'd been cryin'. . . . That's because Father'll have to fight, o' course."

"I wish they'd put it off till I was a man," said 'Bert stoutly.

At this point the wounded hero behaved as he always did on discovering life duller than his hopes. He let out a piercing yell and cried that he wanted his tea. 'Beida dropped her end of the ambulance, seized him as he slid to the ground, shook him up, and told him to behave.

"You can't have your tea for another hour: and what's more, if you're not careful there won't be no amputation till afterwards, when Mother's not lookin' an' we can get a knife off the table. You bad boy!"

'Biades howled afresh.

"If you don't stop it,"—'Bert took a hand in threatening,—"you won't get cut open till Monday; because 'tis Sunday to-morrow. And by that time you'll be festerin', I shouldn't wonder."

"—And mortification will have set in," promised his sister. "When that happens, you may turn up your toes. An' 'tis only a question between oak an' elum."

'Biades ceased yelling as abruptly as he had started. "What's 'fester'?" he demanded.

"You'll know fast enough, when you find yourself one solid scab," began 'Bert. But Nicky-Nan interrupted.

"There, there, children! Run along an' don't 'ee play at trouble. There's misery enough, the Lord knows——" He broke off on a twinge of pain, and stared down-stream at the congregated masts in the little harbour.

Polpier lies in a gorge so steep and deep that though it faces but a little east of south, all its western flank lay already in deep shadow. The sunlight slanting over the ridge touched the tops of the masts, half a dozen of which had trucks with a bravery of gilt, while a couple wore the additional glory of a vane. On these

it flashed, and passed on to bathe the line of cottages along the eastern shore, with the coastguard hut that stood separate beyond them on the round of the cliff-track—all in one quiet golden glow. War? Who could think of War? . . . Nicky-Nan at any rate let the thought of it slip into the sea of his private trouble. It was as though he had hauled up some other man's "sinker" and, discovering his mistake, let it drop back plumb.

While he stared, the children had stolen away.

Yet he loitered there staring, in the hush of the warm afternoon, lifting his eyes a little towards the familiar outline of the hills that almost overlapped, closing out sight of the sea. A verse ran in his head—*"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. . . ."*

The slamming of a door at the street-corner beyond the bridge recalled him to the world of action.

On the doorstep of the local Bank—turning key in lock as he left the premises—stood a man respectably dressed and large of build. It was Mr. Pamphlett, the Bank-Manager. Nicky-Nan thrust his hands in his trouser-pockets and limped towards him.

"If you please, sir——"

Mr. Pamphlett faced about, displaying a broad white waistcoat and a ponderous gold watch-chain.

"Ah! Nanjivell?"

"If you please, sir——" Nicky-Nan, now balanced on his sound leg, withdrew a hand from his pocket and touched his cap. "I've been waitin' your convenience."

"Busy times," said Mr. Pamphlett. "This Moratorium, you know. The War makes itself felt, even in this little place."

If Nicky-Nan had known the meaning of the word Moratorium, it might have given him an opening. But he did not, and so he stood dumb.

"You have come to say, I hope," hazarded Mr. Pamphlett after a pause, "that you don't intend to give me any more trouble? . . . You've given me enough, you know. An Ejectment Order. . . . Still —if, at the last, you've made up your mind to behave——"

"There's no other house, sir. If there was, and you'd let it to me——"

"That's likely, hey? In the present scandalous laxity of the law towards tenants, you've cost me a matter of pounds—not to mention six months' delay, which means money lost—to eject you. You, that owe me six pounds rent! It's likely I'd let you another house—even if I had one!"

"Even if you had the will, 'twouldn' be right, I understand that, sir. Six young men, as I know, waitin' to marry and unable, because the visitors snap up cottage after cottage for summer residences, an' 'll pay you fancy prices; whereas you won't build for the likes o' we."

"Your six young men—if six there be—" said Mr. Pamphlett, "will be best employed for some time to come in fighting for their country. It don't pay to build cottages, I tell you."

Nicky-Nan's right hand gripped the knife in his pocket. But he answered wearily:

"Well, anyways, sir, I don't ask to interfere with them: but only to bide under my own shelter."

"Owing me six pounds arrears, and piling up more? And after driving me to legal proceedings! Look here,

Nanjivell. You are fumbling something in your pocket. Is it the six pounds you owe me?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not. And if it were, I should still demand the costs I've been put to. If you bring me the total on Monday—— But you know very well you cannot."

"No, sir."

"Then," said Mr. Pamphlett, "we waste time. I have been worried enough, these last few days, with more serious business than yours. In the times now upon us a many folk are bound to go to the wall; and the improvident will go first, as is only right. Enough said, my man!"

Nicky-Nan fumbled with the knife in his pocket, but let Mr. Pamphlett pass.

Then he limped back to the house that would be his until Monday, and closed the door. Beyond the frail partition which boarded him off from the Penhaligon family he could hear the children merry at tea.

CHAPTER II

CALL TO ARMS

Nescio qua natale solum dulcedine cunctos
Ducit et immemores non sinit esse sui

—The Old Doctor (to whom we have made allusion) had been moved to write an account of his native place, and had contrived to get it published by subscription in a thin octavo volume of 232 pages, measuring $9 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Copies are rare, but may yet be picked up on secondhand bookstalls for six or seven shillings.

From this *History of Polpier* I must quote—being unable to better it—his description of the little town. [He ever insisted on calling it a town, not a village, although it contained less than fourteen hundred inhabitants.]

"If the map of the coast of Cornwall be examined, on the south-east, between the estuaries of the two rivers that divide the Hundred of West from the Hundred of East and the Hundred of Powder, will be noticed an indentation of the littoral line, in which cleft lies the little town of Polpier. Tall hills, abrupt and rugged, shut in a deep and tortuous valley, formed by the meeting of smaller coombs; houses, which seem dropped rather than built, crowd the valley and its rocky ledges; a rapid rivulet dances in and out among the dwellings, till its voice is lost in the waters of a tidal haven, thronged with fishing boats and guarded by its Peak of serried rock."

The Doctor after this first modest mention of "a

rivulet" invariably writes of it as "the River," and by no other name does Polpier speak of it to this day. On the lower or seaward side of the bridge-end, where the channel measures some three yards across, the flank of his house leaned over the rushing water, to the sound of which he slept at night. Across the stream the house of Mr. Barrabell, clerk, leaned forward at a more pronounced angle, so that the two neighbours, had they been so minded, might have shaken hands between their bedroom windows before retiring to rest. Tradition reports this Mr. Barrabell (though an accountant for most of the privateering companies in Polpier) to have been a timorous man, and that once the Doctor, returning home in the small hours from a midwifery case, found his neighbour and his neighbour's wife hiding together under his bed-clothes. Upon an alarm that Bonaparte was in the town, they had bridged the stream with a ladder to the Doctor's open window and clambered across in their night-clothes. It is reported also that, on the transit, Mrs. Barrabell was heard to say, "Go forward, Theophilus! Th' Old Doctor knows all about *me*, if he don't about you. You can trust 'en to the ends of the world." "That's right enough, ma'am," said the Doctor in his great way; "but you appear to have gone a bit farther." A variant of the story has it that Mrs. Barrabell was found beneath the bed, and her spouse alone between the bed-clothes, into which he had plunged with an exhortation, "Look after yourself, darling!" "And what do you think Theophilus found under that magnificent man's bed?" she asked her neighbours next day. "Why, naught but a plumed hat in a japanned case; no trace of alarm, and yet ready there against any emergency."

The Doctor (I should say) had held a commission —worn a Major's uniform—in the local Artillery Volunteers during those days of the Napoleonic peril. They passed, and he survived to die in times of peace, leaving (as has been told) a local history for his memorial. A tablet to his memory records that "*In all his life he never had a lawsuit. Reader, take example and strive to be so good a man.*"

In his childhood Nicky-Nan had listened to many a legend of the Old Doctor, whose memory haunted every street and by-lane and even attained to something like apotheosis in the talk of the older inhabitants. They told what an eye he had, as a naturalist, for anything uncommon in the maunds; how he taught them to be observant, alert for any strange fish, and to bring it home alive, if possible; and how he was never so happy as when seated on a bollard near the Quay-head with a drawing-board on his knee, busy—for he was a wonder with pencil and brush—transferring to paper the outline and markings of a specimen and its perishable exquisite colours; working rapidly while he listened to the account of its capture, and maybe pausing now and again to pencil a note on the margin of the portrait. They told, too, of his ways—how for a whole month he came forth from his front door in a crouching posture, almost on all fours, so as not to disturb the work of a diadem spider that had chosen to build its web across the porch; of his professional skill, that "trust yourself to th' Old Doctor, and he'd see you came to a nat'ral end of some sort, and in no haste, neither"; of his habit of dress, that (when not in martial uniform) he wore a black suit with knee-breeches, silk

stockings, and silver shoe-buckles; of his kindness of heart, that in the *Notes of Periodic Phenomena*, which he regularly kept, he always recorded a midnight gale towards the close of August, to account for the mysterious depletion of his apple-crop.

But the Old Doctor had gone to his fathers long ago; and the old house, divided into two tenements—with access by one porch and front passage—had been occupied for twenty years past by Nicky-Nan and (for eight or nine) by the Penhaligon family. Nicky-Nan's cantle overhung the river, and comprised a kitchen and scullery on the ground-floor, with a fairly large bedroom above it. The old Doctor's own bedroom it had been, and was remarkable for an open fireplace with two large recessed cupboards let into a wall, which measured a good four feet in depth beyond the chimney-breast. Once, in cleaning out the cupboards, Nicky-Nan had discovered in the right-hand one that one or two boards of the flooring were loose. Lifting them cautiously he had peered into a sort of lazarette deep down in the wall, and had lowered a candle, the flame of which, catching hold of a mass of dried cobweb, had shot up and singed his eyebrows, for a moment threatening to set the house on fire. It had given him a scare, and he never ventured to carry his exploration further.

His curiosity was the less provoked because at least a score of the old houses in Polpier have similar recesses, constructed (it is said) as hiding-places from the press-gang or for smugglers hotly pursued by the dragoons.

The Penhaligon family inhabited the side of the house

that faced the street, and their large living-room was chiefly remarkable for the beams supporting the floor above it. They had all been sawn lengthwise out of a single oak-tree, and the outer edges of some had been left untrimmed. From a nail in the midmost beam hung a small rusty key, around which the spiders wove webs and the children many speculations: for the story went that a brother of the old Doctor's—the scapegrace of the family—had hung it (the key of his quadrant) there, with strong injunctions that no one should take it down until he returned—which he never did. So Mrs. Penhaligon's feather-brush always spared this one spot in the room, every other inch of which she kept scrupulously dusted. She would not for worlds have exchanged lodgings with Nicky-Nan, though his was by far the best bedroom (and far too good for a bachelor man); because from her windows she could watch whatever crossed the bridge—folks going to church, and funerals. But the children envied Nicky-Nan, because from his bedroom window you could—when he was good-natured and allowed you—drop a line into the brawling river. Of course there were no real fish to be caught, but with a cunning cast and some luck you might hook up a tin can or an old boot.

Now Nicky-Nan was naturally fond of children, as by nature he had been designed for a family man; and children gave him their confidence without knowing why. But in his early manhood a girl had jilted him, which turned him against women: later, in the Navy, the death of a friend and messmate, to whom he had transferred all the loyalty of his heart, set him questioning many things in a silent way. He had never been able to dissipate affection or friendship: and his feelings

when hurt, being sensitive as the horns of a snail, withdrew themselves as swiftly into a shell and hid there as obstinately: by consequence of which he earned (without deserving) a name not often entered upon the discharge-sheets of the Royal Navy. But there it stood on his, in black upon white—"A capable seaman. *Morose.*"

He had carried this character, with his discharge-sheet, back to Polpier, where his old friends and neighbours—who had known him as a brisk upstanding lad, sociable enough, though maybe a trifle shy—edged away from the taciturn man who returned to them. Nor did it help his popularity that he attended neither Church nor Chapel: for Polpier is a deeply religious place, in its fashion.

Some of the women-folk—notably Mrs. Polsue, the widow-woman, and Miss Cherry (Charity) Oliver, a bitter spinster—spoke to the Wesleyan Minister about this.

The Minister listened to them politely. He was the gentlest of little men and had a clubfoot. Mrs. Polsue and Miss Oliver (who detested one another) agreed that it would be a day of grace when his term among them expired and he was "planned" for some other place where Christianity did not matter as it did in Polpier. They gave various reasons for this: but their real reason (had they lived in a Palace of Truth) was that the Rev. Mark Hambly never spoke evil of anyone, nor listened to gossip save with a loose attention.

"The man has a wandering mind!" declared Miss Oliver. "It don't seem able to fix itself. If you'll believe me, when I told him about Bestwetherick's daughter and how she'd got herself into trouble at

last, all he could say was, 'Yes, yes, poor thing!'—and invite me to kneel down an' pray she might come safely through it!"

"You surely weren't so weak as to do it?" said Mrs. Polsue, scandalised.

"Me?" exclaimed Cherry. "Pray for that baggage? To start with, I'd be afeared the Lord'd visit it on me. . . . An' then it came out he'd known the whole affair for more than two months. The girl had been to him."

"And he never told? . . . I tell you what, Cherry Oliver! It's my belief that man would set up a confessional, if he could."

"Don't 'ee tell up such things, Mary-Martha Polsue, or I'll go an' drown myself!"

"And why not?—he bein' so thick with Parson Steele, that sticks up 'High Mass' 'pon his church door and is well known to be hand-in-glove with the Pope. I tell you I saw the pair meet this very Wednesday down by the bridge as I happened to be lookin' out waitin' to scold the milk-boy: and they shook hands and stood for up-three-minutes colloguin' together."

When these two ladies joined forces to attack Mr. Hambly on the subject of Nicky-Nan's atheism, presumed upon his neglect to attend public worship, the Minister's lack of interest became fairly exasperating. He arose and opened the window.

"Astonishing plague of house-flies we are suffering from this year," he observed. "You have noticed it, doubtless? . . . Yes, yes—about Nanjivell . . . it is so good of you to feel concerned. I will talk it over with the Vicar."

"God forbid!" Mrs. Polsue ejaculated.

"One uses up fly-papers almost faster than Mrs.

Pengelly can supply them," continued the Minister. "And, moreover, she will sell me but two or three at a time, alleging that she requires all her stock for her own shop. I fell back last week upon treacle. Beer, in small glass jars, is also recommended. I trust that if you ladies see me issuing from the "Three Pilchards" to-morrow with a jug of beer, you will make it your business to protect my character. The purchase will not escape your knowledge, I feel sure. . . . But we were talking of Nanjivell. I have some reason to believe that he is a God-fearing man, though his religion does not take a—er—congregational turn. Moreover, he is a sick man."

"H'mph!" Miss Oliver sniffed.

"The amount of disease disseminated by house-flies is, I am told, incalculable," pursued Mr. Hambly. "Yes—as I was saying, or about to say—it's a pity that, in a small town like Polpier, two ministers of religion cannot between them keep a general shop to suit all tastes, like Mrs. Pengelly." Mr. Hambly's voice dropped as he wound up. "Ah, if—like Mrs. Pengelly —we kept bull's-eyes for the children!"

"And for another year we have to sit under a man like that!" said Mrs. Polsue to Miss Oliver on their way homeward.

Nicky-Nan had one thing in his favour. He came of an old Polpier stock. It had decayed, to be sure, and woefully come down in the world: but the town, though its tongue may wag, has ever a soft heart towards its own. And the Nanjivells had been of good "haveage" (lineage) in their time. They had counted in the family a real Admiral, of whom Nicky-

Nan had inherited a portrait in oil-colours. It hung in the parlour-kitchen underneath his bedroom, between two marine paintings of Vesuvius erupting by day and Vesuvius erupting by night: and the Penhaligon children stood in terrible awe of it because the eyes followed you all round the room, no matter what corner you took.

In neighbourliness, then, and for the sake of his haveage, Nicky-Nan's first welcome home had been kindly enough. His savings were few, but they bought him a small share in a fishing-boat, besides enabling him to rent the tenement in the Doctor's House, and to make it habitable with a few sticks of furniture. Also he rented a potato-patch, beyond the coastguard's hut, around the eastward cliff, and tilled it assiduously. Being a man who could do with a very little sleep, he would often be found hard at work there by nine in the morning, after a long night's fishing.

Thus, though always on the edge of poverty, he had managed his affairs—until four years ago, when the trouble began with his leg.

At first he paid little heed to it, since it gave him no pain and little more than a passing discomfort. It started, in fact, as a small hard cyst low down at the back of the right thigh, incommoding him when he bent his knee. He called it "a nut in the flesh," and tried once or twice to get rid of it by squeezing it between fingers and thumb. It did not yield to this treatment.

He could not fix, within a month or so, the date when it began to hurt him. But it had been hurting him, off and on, for some weeks, when one night, tacking out towards the fishing-grounds against a stiffish southerly breeze, as he ran forward to tend the

foresheet his leg gave way under him as if it had been stabbed, and he rolled into the scuppers in intolerable anguish. For a week after this Nicky-Nan nursed himself ashore, and it was given out that he had twisted his knee-cap. He did not call in a doctor, although the swelling took on a red and angry hue. As a fact, no medical man now resided within three miles of Polpier. (When asked how they did without one, the inhabitants answered gravely that during the summer season, when the visitors were about, Dr. Mant came over twice a week from St. Martin's; in the winter they just died a natural death.)

At any rate Nicky-Nan, because he was poor, would not call in a doctor; and, because he was proud, would not own to anything worse than a twisted knee, even when his neighbours on the Quay, putting their heads together, had shaken them collectively and decided that "the poor man must be suff'rin' from something chronic."

Then followed a bitter time, as his savings dwindled. He made more than a dozen brave attempts to resume his old occupation. But in the smallest lop of a sea he was useless, so that it became dangerous to take him. Month by month he fell farther back in arrears of rent.

And now the end seemed to have arrived with Mr. Pamphlett's notice of ejectment. Nicky-Nan, of course, held that Mr. Pamphlett had a personal grudge against him. Mr. Pamphlett had nothing of the sort. In ordinary circumstances, knowing Nicky-Nan to be an honest man, he would have treated him easily. But he wanted to "develop" Polpier to his own advantage: and his scheme of development centred on the old house by the bridge. He desired to pull it down and transfer

the Bank to that eligible site. He had a plan of the proposed new building, with a fine stucco frontage and edgings of terra-cotta.

Mr. Pamphlett saw his way to make this improvement, and was quite resolute about it; and Nicky-Nan, by his earlier reception of notices to quit, had not bettered any chance of resisting. Still—had Nicky-Nan known it—Mr. Pamphlett, like many another bank manager, had been caught and thrown in a heap by the sudden swoop of War. Over the telephone wires he had been in agitated converse all day with his superiors, who had at length managed to explain to him the working of the financial Moratorium.

So Mr. Pamphlett, knowing there must be War, had clean forgotten the Ejectment Order, until Nicky-Nan inopportunely reminded him of it; and in his forgetfulness, being testy with overwork, had threatened execution on Monday — which would be the 3rd: August Bank Holiday, and a *dies non*.

Somehow Nicky-Nan had forgotten this too. It did not occur to him until after he had supped on boiled potatoes with a touch of butter, pepper and salt, washed down with water, a drink he abhorred. When it occurred to him, he smote his thigh and was rewarded with a twinge of pain.

He had all Sunday and all Monday in which to lay his plans before the final evacuation, if evacuation there must be. The enemy had miscalculated. He figured it out two or three times over, made sure he was right, and went to bed in his large gaunt bedroom with a sense of triumph.

Between now and Tuesday a great many things might happen.

A great many things were, in fact, happening. Among them, Europe — wire answering wire — was engaged in declaring general War.

Nicky-Nan, stretched in the four-post bed which had been the Old Doctor's, recked nothing of this. But his leg gave him considerable pain that night. He slept soon, but ill, and awoke before midnight to the sound—as it seemed—of sobbing. Something was wrong with the Penhaligons' children? Yet no . . . the sound seemed to come rather from the chamber where Mr. and Mrs. Penhaligon slept. . . . It ceased, and he dropped off to sleep again.

Oddly enough he awoke—not having given it a thought before—with a scare of War upon him.

In his dream he had been retracing accurately and in detail a small scene of the previous morning, at the moment quite without significance for him. Limping back from his cliff-patch with a basket of potatoes in one hand and with the other using the shaft of his mattock (or "visgy" in Polpier language) for a walking-staff, as he passed the watch-house he had been vaguely surprised to find Coastguardsman Varco on the look-out there with his glass, and halted.

"Hallo, Bill Varco! Wasn't it you 'pon duty yesterday? Or has my memory lost count 'pon the days o' the week?"

"It's me, right enough," said Varco; "an' no one but Peter Hosken left with me, to take turn an' turn about. They've called the others up to Plymouth."

"But why?" Nicky Nan had asked: and the coastguardsman had responded:

"You can put two an' two together, neighbour. Add 'em up as you please."

The scene and the words, repeated through his dream, came back now very clearly to him.

"But when a man's in pain and nervous," he told himself, "the least little thing bulks big in his mind." War? They couldn't really mean it. . . . That scare had come and had passed, almost a score of times. . . . Well, suppose it was War? . . . that again might be the saving of him. Folks mightn't be able to serve Ejectment Orders in time of War. . . . Besides, now he came to think of it, back in the week there had been some panic in the banks, and some talk of a law having been passed by which debts couldn't be recovered in a hurry. And, anyway, Mr. Pamphlett had forgotten about Bank Holiday. There was no hurry before Tuesday. . . .

Nicky-Nan dropped off again into a sleep punctuated by twinges of pain.

Towards dawn, as the pain eased, his slumber grew deeper and undisturbed. He was awakened by—What?

At first it seemed to be the same sound of sobbing to which he had listened early in the night. Then, with a start, he knew it to be something quite different —an impatient knocking at the foot of his bed-chamber stairs.

Nicky-Nan shuffled out of bed, opened his door, and peered down the stairway.

"Who's there?" he challenged. "And what's your business? Hallo!"—catching sight of Bill Varco, coastguardsman, on the flat below—"the house afire? Or what brings you?"

"The Reserves are called out," answered up Bill Varco. "You'll get your paper later. But the Chief Officer's here from Troy with a little fellow from the

Customs there, and I be sent round with the first news. I've two dozen yet to warn . . . In the King's name! An' there'll be a brake waiting by the bridge-end at ten-thirty. If War isn't declared, it mighty soon will be. Take notice!"

Bill Varco disappeared, sharp on the word. Nicky-Nan paused a moment, hobbled back to bed and sat on the edge of it, steadying himself, yet half-awake.

"It's some trick of Pamphlett's to get me out," he decided, and went downstairs cautiously.

CHAPTER III

HOW THE MEN WENT

In the passage he found Mrs. Penhaligon standing, alone, rigid as a statue. By her attitude she seemed to be listening. Yet she had either missed to hear or, hearing, had missed to understand Varco's call up the stairs. At Nicky-Nan's footstep she turned, with a face white and set.

"Sam's got to go," she said. Her lips twitched.

"Nonsense, woman! Some person's playin' a trick 'pon the town."

"They start from the bridge at ten-thirty. There's no trick about it. Go an' see for yourself." She motioned with her hand.

Nicky-Nan limped to the porch and peeked out (as they say at Polpier). Up the street the women stood clacking the news just as though it were a week-day and the boats had brought in a famous haul. Feminine gossip in Polpier is not conducted in groups, as the men conduct theirs on the Quay. By tradition each housewife takes post on her own threshold-slate, and knits while she talks with her neighbours to right and left and across the road; thus a bit of news, with comment and embellishment zigzags from door to door through the town like a postal delivery. To-day being Sunday, the women had no knitting; but it was observable that while Mrs. Trebilcock, two doors away, led the chorus as usual, her hands moved as though

plying imaginary needles: and so did the hands of Sarah Jane Johns over the way.

Down by the bridge-end two men in uniform sat side by side on the low parapet, sorting out a small pile of blue papers. They were Mr. Irons, the Chief Officer of Coastguard at Troy, and a young Custom House officer—a stranger to Nicky-Nan. The morning sunlight played on their brass buttons and cap-rims.

Nicky-Nan withdrew his head hastily.

"Where's Sam?" he asked.

"Gone down to Billy Bosistow's to fetch his sea-boots."

"I don't follow 'ee." Nicky-Nan rubbed his unshaven jaw with two fingers. "Is the world come to its end, then, that Billy Bosistow keeps open shop on a Sunday mornin'?"

"'Tisn' like that at all. . . . You see, Sam's a far-seein' man, or I've tried to make him so. I reckon there's no man in Polpier 'll turn out in a kit smellin' stronger of camphor, against the moth. Twice this week I've had it out an' brushed it, fingerin' (God help me) the clothes an' prayin' no shell to strike 'en, here or there. . . . Well, an' last autumn, bein' up to Plymouth, he bought an extry pair of sea-boots, Yarmouth-made, off some Stores on the Barbican, an' handed 'em over to Billy to pickle in some sort o' grease that's a secret of his own to make the leather supple an' keep it from perishin'. He've gone down to fetch 'em; an' there's no Sabbath-breakin' in a deed like that, when a man's country calls 'en."

"'Tis terrible sudden, all this," said Nicky-Nan, ruminating.

"'Tis worse than sudden. Here we be, with orders

to clear out before Michaelmas: and how be I to do that, with my man away? Think of all the great lerrupin' furnicher to be shifted an' (what's harder) stowed in a pokey little cottage that wasn' none too big for Aun' Bunney when she lived. An' sixteen steps up to the door, with a turn in 'em! Do 'ee mind what a Dover-to-pay there was gettin' out the poor soul's coffin? An' then look at the size of my dresser. . . ."

"I can't think why you turn out, for my part. Pamphlett's served me with notice to quit by to-morra. You don't catch me, though."

"Why, Mr. Nanjivell, you won't set yourself up to fly in the teeth of the law!"

"Just you wait. . . . And Pamphlett doesn' know all the law that's in the land, neither, if he reckons to turn me out 'pon a Bank Holiday."

Mrs. Penhaligon stared. "Well, I s'wow! Bank Holiday to-morra, and I'd clean forgot it! . . . But, with the Lord's Sabbath standin' 'pon its head, 'tis excusable. The children, now—out an' runnin' the town in the Sunday clothes with never a thought o' breakfast; and how I'm to get their boots an' faces clean in time for Chapel, let alone washin'-up, I ask you!"

"Well, I'll go upstairs an' get a shave," said Nicky-Nan. "*That*'ll feel like Sunday anyhow."

"Poor lonely creatur'!" thought Mrs. Penhaligon, who always pitied bachelors. On an impulse she said, "An' when you've done, Mr. Nanjivell, there'll be fried eggs an' bacon, if you're not above acceptin' the compliment for once."

When Nicky Nan came downstairs again, clean-shaven and wearing his Sunday suit of threadbare

sea-cloth, he found the Penhaligon children seated at the board, already plying their spoons in bowls of bread-and-milk. As a rule, like other healthy children, they ate first and talked afterwards. But to-day, with War in the air, they chattered, stirring the sop around and around. 'Beida's eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed.

"War's a funny thing," she mused. "Where do *you* feel it, Mother?"

"Don't clacky so much, that's a darlin', but go on with your breakfast." But Mrs. Penhaligon heaved a sigh that was answer enough.

"Well, I wanted to know, because down by Quay-end I heard old Aun' Rundle say it made her feel like the bottom of her stomach was fallin' out. I suppose it takes people differ'nt as they get up in years."

"I know azackly where *I* feel it!" announced 'Biades. It's *here*." He set down his spoon and pointed a finger on the third button of his small waistcoat. "An' it keeps workin' up an' down an' makin' noises just like Billy Richard's key-bugle."

"Then it's a mercy it ben't real," commented his brother.

"'Biades is right, all the same." 'Beida regarded the child and nodded slowly. "It do feel very much like when you hear a band comin' up the street. It catches you——" She broke off and laid her open palm on her chest a little below the collar. "An' then it's creepin' up the back of your legs an' along your arms, an' up your backbone, right into the roots o' your hair. But the funniest thing of all is, the place looks so differ'nt—an' all the more because there's so little happenin' differ'nt. . . . I can't tell just what I mean," she owned candidly, turning to Nicky-

Nan; "but it don't seem we be *here* somehow, nor the houses don't seem real, somehow. 'Tis as if your real inside was walkin' about somewhere else, listenin' to the band."

"Nonsense you're tellin'," 'Bert interrupted. "Father's put on his uniform. How can you make it that things ben't differ'nt, after that?"

"An' *he*'s here!" 'Biades nodded, over his half-lifted spoon, at Nicky-Nan.

"Oh!" said 'Bert, "that isn' because of the War. That's to say Good-bye, because he's turnin' out this week."

"For goodness, children, eat up your meal, an' stop talkin'!" Mrs. Penhaligon returned from the hearth to the table and set down a dish of eggs and sizzling bacon. "Wherever you pick up such notions! . . . You must excuse their manners, Mr. Nanjivell."

But Nicky-Nan was staring at young 'Bert from under fiercely bent eyebrows.

"Who told you that I was turnin' out this week?" he demanded.

"I heard Mr. Pamphlett say it, day before yesterday. He was round with Squinny Gilbert——"

"Fie now, your manners get worse and worse!" his mother reproved him. "Who be you, to talk of the builder-man without callin' him 'Mister'?"

"Well then, he was round with Mister Squinny Gilbert, lookin' over the back o' the house. I heard him say as you was done for, and would have to clear inside the next two or three days——"

"He did—did he?" Nicky-Nan was arising in ungovernable rage; but Mrs. Penhaligon coaxed him to sit down.

"There now!" she said soothingly. "Take an' eat, Mr. Nanjivell! The Good Lord bids us be like the lilies o' the field, and I can vouch the eggs to be new-laid. Sufficient for the day. . . . An' here 'tis the Sabbath, an' to-morrow Bank Holiday. Put the man out o' your thoughts, an' leave the Lord to provide."

"If I had that man here——"

Nicky-Nan was sharp set; indeed he had been hungry, more or less, for weeks. But now, with the eggs and bacon wooing his nostrils, his choler arose and choked him. He stared around the cleanly kitchen. "And on quarter-day, ma'am, 'twill be your turn. It beats me how you can take it so quiet."

"I reckon," said Mrs. Penhaligon simply, looking down on the dish of eggs (which maybe suggested the image to her)—"I reckon as the hen's home is wherever she can gather the chickens under her wings. Let's be thankful we're not like they poor folk abroad, to have our homes overrun by this War."

"'War'?" Nicky-Nan recollected himself with an effort. "Seemin' to me you're all taken up with it. As though there weren't other things in this world——"

"If only the Almighty'll send my Sam home safe an' well!"

But at this point Mr. Penhaligon entered the kitchen, with the sea-boots dangling from his hand. He wore his naval uniform—that of an A.B.; blue jumper and trousers, white singlet edged with blue around his stout throat, loose black neck-cloth and lanyard white as driven snow. His manner was cheerful—even ostentatiously cheerful: but it was to be observed that his eyes avoided his wife's.

"Hallo, naybour!" he shouted, perceiving Nicky-

Nan. "Well, now, I count this real friendly of ye, to come an' give me the send-off." And indeed Nicky's presence seemed to be a sensible relief to him. "Haven't ate all the eggs, I hope? For I be hungry as a hunter. . . . Well, so it's War for sure, and a man must go off to do his little bit; though how it happened ——" In the act of helping himself he glanced merrily around the table. "Eh, 'Beida, my li'l gel, what be you starin' at so hard?"

"Father looks fine, don't-a?" responded 'Beida, addressing the company.

"What I want to know," said 'Bert, "is why he couldn' have married Mother years afore he did—an' then I'd have been a man an' able to work a gun."

"Ho!" Mr. Penhaligon brought his fist down on the table with huge enjoyment. "Hear that, my dear? Wants to know why we didn' marry years afore we did?" He turned to his wife, appealing to her to enjoy the joke, but hastily averted his eyes. "Well, now, I'll tell ye, sonny—if it's strictly atween you an' me an' the bedpost. I asked her half a dozen times: but she wouldn' have me. No: look at me she wouldn' till I'd pined away in flesh for her, same as you see me at present. . . . Eh, M'ria? What's your version?"

Mrs. Penhaligon burst into tears; and then, as her husband jumped up to console her, started to scold the children furiously for dawdling over breakfast, when goodness knew, with their clothes in such a state, how long it would take to get them ready for Chapel.

The children understood and gulped down the rest of their breakfast hastily, while their mother turned to the fireplace and set the saucepan hissing again. Having

finished this second fry, she tipped the cooked eggs on to the dish, and swept the youngsters off to be titivated.

Nicky-Nan and his host ate in a constrained silence. Nicky, though ravenous, behaved politely, and only accepted a fifth egg under strong pressure.

"Curious caper, this o' Germany's," said Mr. Penhaligon, by way of making conversation. "But our Navy's all right."

"Sure," Nicky-Nan agreed.

"I've been studyin' the papers, though—off an' on. The Kaiser's been layin' up for this, these years past: and by my reck'nin' 'tis goin' to be a long business. . . . I don't tell the Missus *that*, you'll understand? But I'd take it friendly if you kept an eye on 'em, as a naybour. . . . O' course 'tis settled we must clear out from here."

"I don't see it," said Nicky-Nan, pursing his lips.

"Pamphlett's a strong man. What he wants he thinks he's bound to have—same as these Germans."

"He won't, then: nor they neither."

"'Tis a pity about your leg, anyway," said Mr. Penhaligon sympathetically, and stared about the room. "Life's a queer business," he went on after a pause, his eyes fixed on the old beam whence the key depended. "To think that I be eatin' the last meal in this old kitchen. An' yet so many have eaten meals here an' warmed theirselves in their time. Yet all departed afore us! . . . But anyway you'll be hereabouts: an' that'll be a cheerin' kind o' thought, o' lonely nights —that you'll be hereabouts, with your eye on 'em."

He lit a pipe and, whilst puffing at it, pricked up his ears to the sound of wheels down the street. The brakes were arriving at the bridge-end. He suggested

that—his own kit being ready—they should stroll down together for a look. Nicky-Nan did not dare to refuse.

The young Custom-house Officer, as he caught sight of Penhaligon approaching in uniform, slipped down from the parapet of the bridge, and sorted out his summons from the pile of blue papers in his hand.

"That's all right, my billy," Penhaligon assured him. "Don't want no summons, more'n word that His Majesty has a use for me."

"Your allotment paper'll be made out when you get to St. Martin's, or else aboard ship."

"Right. A man takes orders in these days."

"But go back and fetch your kit," advised the Chief Officer of Coastguard, who had strolled up. "The brake'll be arriving in ten minutes." He paid Nicky-Nan the attention of a glance—no more.

While Penhaligon was away, kissing his wife and family and bidding them farewell (good man!) in tones unnaturally confident and robustious, the last brake rattled up to the bridge-end with a clatter. The whole town had assembled by this time, a group about each cheerful hero.

It was a scene that those who witnessed it remembered through many trying days to come. They knew not at all why their country should be at war. Over the harbour lay the usual Sabbath calm: high on the edge of the uplands stood the outposts of the corn, yellowing to harvest: over all the assured God of their fathers reigned in the August heaven. Not a soul present had ever harboured one malevolent thought against a single German. Yet the thing had happened: and here, punctually summoned, the men were climbing on board

the brakes, laughing, rallying their friends left behind —all going to slay Germans.

The Custom-house Officer moved about from one brake to another, calling out names and distributing blue papers.

"Nicholas Nanjivell!"

There was a shout of laughter as Nicky-Nan put his best face upon it and limped forward.

"Why, the man's no use. Look at his leg!"

The young officer scanned Nicky, suspiciously at first.

"Well, you'll have to take your paper anyway," said he—and Nicky took it. "You'd best see the doctor and get a certificate."

The two officers climbed in at the tail of the hindmost brake, and the drivers waved their whips for a cheer, which was given. As the procession started, all on board waved their caps and broke out singing. They were Cornishmen and knew no music-hall songs— "It's a long way to Tipperary" or anything of the sort. Led by a fugleman in the first brake, they started— singing it in fine harmonies—

"He's the Lily—of the Valley,
O—my—soul!"

So the first batch of men from Polpier were rattled through the street and away up the hill. The crowd lingered awhile and dispersed, gossiping, to Church or Chapel.

Nicky-Nan, seated on the parapet of the bridge, unfolded the blue paper which the young officer had thrust into his hand. He was alone and could study it at leisure.

It was headed by the Royal Arms, and it ran as follows:

R.V. 53
Actual Service Form

From	*To*
The Registrar of Naval Reserve,	*Royal Naval Reserve Man,*
Port of TROY.	NICHOLAS NANJIVELL,
	Polpier.

NOTICE TO MEN OF ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE TO JOIN THE ROYAL NAVY.

HIS MAJESTY THE KING having issued His Proclamation calling into Active Service, under the Act 22 & 23 Vict. c. 40, the ROYAL NAVAL RESERVE FORCE in which you are enrolled, you are required to report yourself at once in uniform and with your Certificate R.V. 2 at 12 noon o'clock on August 2nd at the Custom House, St. Martin's, Cornwall.

You will be forthwith despatched to the Naval Depot and should bring with you any necessary articles.

Should absence from home prevent your receiving this notice in time to attend at once or at the hour specified, you should on its receipt proceed forthwith to the Mercantile Marine Office named.

Failure to report yourself without delay will render you liable to arrest as a Deserter.

NOTE.—Reasonable expenses incurred in travelling from your home will be allowed.

By command,
JOSHUA JOHNS, *Registrar.*
Dated this Second day of August 1914.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST SERMON

SOME ten minutes after the brakes had departed, Mrs. Polsue and Miss Oliver, bound for divine service, encountered at the corner where Jolly Hill unites with Bridge Street, and continued their way together up the Valley road.

"Good morning! This is terrible news," said Miss Oliver, panting a little, for she had tripped down the hill in a great hurry.

"I have been expecting it for a long while," responded Mrs. Polsue darkly. Like some other folks in this world, she produced much of her total effect by suggesting that she had access to sources of information sealed to the run of mankind. She ever managed to convey the suggestion by phrases—and, still more cleverly, by silences—which left the evidence conveniently vague. To be sure, a great-uncle of hers had commanded in his time a Post-Office Packet plying between Falmouth and Surinam, and few secrets of the Government had been withheld from him: but he was now, as Mrs. Polsue had to confess, "no more," and when you came to reflect on it (as you sometimes did after taking leave of her), the sort of knowledge she had been intimating could hardly have been telegraphed from another and better world. She had also a cousin in London, "in a large way of drapery business," who communicated to her—or was supposed to communicate—"what was wearing"; an advantage which

she used, however, less to refresh her own toilettes than to discourage her neighbours'. Moreover, there was a brother-in-law somewhere "in the Civil Service," to whom she made frequent allusion. But the knowledge she derived from him concerning State secrets or high politics could, at the best, but be far from recent, because as a fact the pair had not been on terms of intercourse by speech or letter since her husband's decease twelve years ago. (There had been some unpleasantness over the Will.)

"I have been expecting it for a long while," asseverated Mrs. Polsue.

"Gracious! Why?"

"You are panting. You are short of breath. You should be more careful of yourself than to come hurrying down the hill at such a rate, at your time of life," said Mrs. Polsue. "It reddens the face, too: which is a consideration if you insist on wearing that bit of crimson in your hat. The two shades don't go together."

"It is not crimson. It is cherry," said Miss Oliver.

"Which, dear?"

"The ribbon, Mary-Martha. You should wear glasses. . . . But I started late," Miss Oliver confessed. "I didn't like to show myself walking to Chapel, and so many of the men-folk passing in the opposite direction. It seemed so *marked*." She might have confessed further (but did not) that she had waited, peeping over her blind, to see the brakes go by. "But *you* were late too," she added.

"If you will use your reason, Cherry Oliver, it might tell you that I couldn't get past the crowd on the bridge, and was *forced* to wait."

"Dear me, now! Was it so thick as all that? . . . You know, I can't see the bridge from my back window —only a bit of the Old Doctor's house past the corner of Climoe's: and I shan't see the bridge even when the old house comes down. But I called in builder Gilbert last Monday on pretence that the back launder wanted repairing; and when he'd examined it and found it all right, I asked him how pulling down that house would affect the view: and he said that in his opinion it would open up a bit of the street just in front of the Bank, so that I shall be able to see all the customers going in and out."

This was news to Mrs. Polsue, and it did not please her at all. Her own bow-window enfiladed the Bank entrance (as well as that of the "Three Pilchards" by the Quay-head), and so gave her a marked advantage over her friend. To speak in military phrase, her conjectures upon other folks' business were fed by a double line of communication.

"Well, my dear, you won't pry on *me* going in and out there," she answered tartly, with a sniff. "Whenever I wish to withdraw some of my balance, to invest it, I send for Mr. Pamphlett, and he calls on me and advises—I am bound to say—always most politely."

But here Miss Oliver put in her shot. (And Mrs. Polsue indeed should have been warier: for the pair were tried combatants. But a tendency to lose her temper, and, losing it, to speak in haste, was ever her fatal weakness.)

"Why, of course, . . . and *that* accounts for it," Miss Oliver murmured.

"Accounts for what?"

"Oh, nothing. . . . There was a visitor here last

summer—I forget her name, but she used to go about making water-colours in a mushroom hat you might have bought for sixpence—quite a simple good creature: and one day, drinking tea at the Minister's, she raised quite a laugh by being so much concerned over your health. She said she'd seen the doctor calling at your house almost every day with a little black bag, and made sure there must have been an operation. She mistook Mr. Pamphlett for the doctor, if you ever heard tell of such simple-mindedness."

"WHAT?"

"And the awkward part of it was," Miss Oliver continued in a musing voice, searching her memory—"the awkward part was, poor Mrs. Pamphlett's being present."

"And you never told me, Cherry Oliver, until this moment!" exclaimed the widow.

"One doesn't go about repeating every little trifle. . . . And, for that matter, Mrs. Pamphlett was just as much amused as everybody else. 'Well, the bare idea!' she cried out. 'I must speak to Pamphlett about this! And Mary-Martha Polsue, of all women!' These were her very words. But of course one had to say *something* to explain to the other innocent woman and stop her running on. So I told who you were; and that, as everybody knew, you were a well-to-do woman, and no doubt would feel a desire to consult your banker oftener than the most of us."

"If you had money of your own, Cherry Oliver, you'd know how vulgar it feels to have the thing paraded like that."

"But I haven't," said Miss Oliver cheerfully. "And, anyway, you weren't there, and I did my best for you. . . . Well, now, I'm glad sure enough to know *from*

you that 'tis vulgar to make much of your wealth, and I'll remember it against the time my ship comes home. . . . Somebody did explain—now I come to think of it—that maybe you'd be all the more dependent on Pamphlett's advice, seein' that you hadn't been used to handle money before you were married, and it all came from your husband." ["There! And I don't think she'll mention my cherry ribbon again in a hurry," thought Miss Oliver.]

After a moment's silence Mrs. Polsue rallied.

"I was saying that this War didn't surprise me. The wonder to me is, the Almighty's wrath hasn't descended on this nation long before. He must be more patient than you or me, Charity Oliver; or else more blind, which isn't to be supposed. Take Polpier, now. The tittle-tattle that goes about, as you've just been admitting; and the drinking habits amongst the men—I saw Zeb Mennear come out his doorway, not fifteen minutes since, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve; and him just about to board the brake and go off to be shot by the Germans!"

"Maybe 'twas after kissin' his wife good-bye," Miss Oliver suggested. "*I* should!"

"There's no accounting for tastes, as you say. . . . But I've had good reason to know for some time that they order a supply into the house and drink when nobody is looking. I've seen the boy from the "Pilchards" deliver a bottle there almost every Saturday. . . . So, the publics being closed this morning, he can't help himself but go off with (I dare say) a noggin of Plymouth gin for a stiffener; and might, for all we know, be called to the presence of his Maker with it still inside him."

"What worries me," confessed Miss Oliver, "is the Government's being so inconsistent. It closes the public-houses on a six-days' licence and then goes and declares War on the very day the magistrates have taken the trouble to hallow." She shook her head. "I may be mistaken—Heaven send that I am!—but I can't see on any Christian principles how a nation can look to prosper that declares war on a Sabbath. If it's been coming this long while, as everybody seems to say now, why couldn't we have waited until the clocks had finished striking twelve to-night—or else done it yesterday, if there was all that hurry?"

"The Battle of Waterloo was fought on a Sunday," Mrs. Polsue put in. "I've often heard my great-uncle Robert mention it as a remarkable fact."

"Then you may be sure the French began it, with their Continental ideas of Sunday observance. I suppose we mustn't speak ill of the French, now that we're allies with them. But I couldn't, when I heard the news, help fearing that our King and his Cabinet had been led away by them in this matter: and once you begin tampering with the Lord's Day——" Miss Oliver shivered. "We shall have the shops open next, I shouldn't wonder."

"You are right about the Battle of Waterloo," said Mrs. Polsue. "My great-uncle Robert was always positive that the French began it. He had that on the best authority. The Duke of Wellington, he said, had no choice but to resist: and it must have gone all the more against the grain because he was distantly connected with John Wesley, only for some reason or another they spelt their names differently. My great-uncle, in the room that he called his study, had two en-

gravings, one on each side of the chimney-piece. One was John Wesley, when quite a child, being rescued from a burning house, with his father right in the foreground giving thanks to God in the old-fashioned knee-breeches that were then worn. The other represented the Duke of Wellington in a similar frame on his famous charger Copenhagen and in the act of saying in his racy way, 'Up, Guards, and at 'em!' My great-uncle would often point to these two pictures and spell out the names for us as children. 'W-e-s-l-e-y' and 'W-e-l-l-e-s-l-e-y,' he would say. 'What different destinies the Almighty can spell into the same word by sticking a few letters in the middle!'"

"It's to be wished we had more men of that stamp in these days," sighed Miss Oliver. "I should feel safer."

"I hear Lord Kitchener well spoken of," said her friend guardedly. "But I think we go too fast, my dear. It does not follow, because the Reserves are called up, that War is actually declared. It is sometimes done by way of precaution—though God forbid I should say a word in defence of a Government which taxes us for being patriotic enough to keep domestic servants. That doesn't, of course, apply to *you*, my dear; still——"

"It only makes matters worse," Miss Oliver declared hastily. "If they haven't declared War yet, there's the less hurry to gallivant these Reservists about in brakes when to-morrow's a Bank Holiday. And, as for patriotism, if I choose to fall downstairs taking up my own coals, surely I'm as patriotic as if I employed another person to do it: though for some reason best known to itself the Law doesn't compensate *me*."

"There's something in what you say," agreed Mrs. Polsue, a little mollified, having caused her friend to

rankle. "And the Law—or the Government, or whatever you choose to call it—could afford the money, too, if 'twould look sharper after compensating *itself*. . . . A perfectly scandalous sight I witnessed just now, by the bridge. There was that Nicholas Nanjivell called up to take his marching-orders, and—well, you know how the man has been limping these months past. The thing was so ridic'lous, the other men shouted with laughter; and prettily annoyed the Customs Officer, for he went the colour of a turkey-cock. ''Tis your own fault,' I had a mind to tell him, 'for not having looked after your business.' Pounds and pounds of public money that Nanjivell must have drawn first and last for Reservist's pay, and nobody takin' the trouble to report on him."

"I suppose," said Miss Oliver, "the man really *is* lame, and not shamming?"

"The Lord knows, my dear. 'Twas *somebody's* business to have a look at the man's leg, and not mine nor yours, I hope. . . . Put it now that the case had been properly reported and a doctor sent to see the man. If he's shamming—and unlikelier things have happened, now you mention it—the doctor finds him out. If the man's sick, and 'tis incurable, well, so much the worse for him: but anyway Government stops paying for a fighting man that can't fight—for that is what it amounts to."

"You can't make it less," Miss Oliver agreed.

"But doctors are terribly skilful nowadays with the knife," went on Mrs. Polsue. "Very likely this growth, or whatever it is, might have been removed months ago."

"He ought to be made to undergo an operation."

"And then, most like, he'd have gone off with

the others to be fed at the country's expense and no housekeeping to worry him, instead of giving Mr. Pamphlett trouble. For he has been giving Mr. Pamphlett trouble. Three times this past week I've seen him call at the Bank, and if you tell me 'twas to put money on deposit——"

"If builder Gilbert is right," put in Miss Oliver with a sigh of envy, "I shall be able to see the Bank as well as you, when that house comes down: and I shan't want to use spectacles neither." She cut in with this stroke as the pair joined the small throng of worshippers entering the Chapel porch. Also she took care to speak the last seven words (as Queen Elizabeth danced) "high and disposedly," giving her friend no time for a *riposte*.

The Minister, Mr. Hambly, gave his congregation a very short service that morning. He opened with three sentences from the Book of Common Prayer: "Rend your heart, and not your garments. . . . Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord. . . . If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Then, after a little pause, he gave out the hymn that begins "On earth we now lament to see." . . . It had not been sung within those walls in the oldest folks' remembrance—nay, since the Chapel had been built; and many were surprised to find it in the book. But at the second verse they picked up the tune and sang it with a will:

"As 'listed on Abaddon's side,
They mangle their own flesh and slay,

Tophet is moved and opens wide
Its mouth for its enormous prey;
And myriads sink beneath the grave
And plunge into the flaming wave.

O might the universal Friend
This havoc of his creatures see!" . . .

They sang it lustily to the end. With a gesture of the hand Mr. Hambly bade all to kneel, opened the Book of Common Prayer again, and instead of "putting up" an extempore prayer, recited that old one prescribed for use "*In the Time of War and Tumults*":

"O Almighty God, King of all kings, and Governour of all things, whose power no creature is able to resist, . . . Save and deliver us, we humbly beseech thee, from the hands of our enemies; abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices; that we, being armed with thy defence, may be preserved evermore from all perils, to glorify thee, who art the only giver of all victory;" . . .

The voice, though creaking in tone and uttering borrowed words, impressed many among its audience with its accent of personal sincerity. Mrs. Polsue knelt and listened with a gathering choler. This Hambly had no unction. He could never improve an occasion: the more opportunity it gave the more helplessly he fell back upon old formulæ composed by Anglicans long ago. She had often enough resented the Minister's dependence on these out-of-date phrases, written (as like as not) by men in secret sympathy with the Mass.

Mr. Hambly arose from his knees, opened the Book, and said: "The portion of Scripture I have chosen for this morning is taken from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, vi. 10:

'My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.'"

He paused here, and for a moment seemed about to continue his reading; but, as if on a sudden compulsion, closed the book, and went on:

"My Brethren,—choose any of those words. They shall be my text; they and those I read to you just now: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'

"In entering upon this War we may easily tell ourselves that we have no sin: for in fact not a man or a woman in this congregation—so far as I know—harbours, or has harboured a single thought of evil disposition against the people who, from to-morrow, are to be our enemies, in whose distress we shall have to exult. In a few days this will seem very strange to you; but it is a fact.

"So it might plausibly be said that not we, but our Government, make this war upon a people with whom you and I have no quarrel.

"But that will not do; for in a nation ruled as ours is, no Ministry can make war unless having the people behind it. That is certain. The whole people—not only of Great Britain, but of Ireland too—seems to be silently aware that a War has been fastened upon it, not to be shirked or avoided, and is arming; but still

without hate. So far as, in this little corner of the world, I can read your hearts, they answer to my own in this—that they have harboured no hate against Germany, and indeed, even now, can hardly teach themselves to hate.

"None the less, the German Emperor protests, calling on God for witness, that the sword has been thrust into his hand: and, if he honestly believes this, there must be some great confusion of mind in this business. One party or the other must be walking under some terrible hallucination.

"The aged Austrian Emperor calls on *his* God to justify him. So does the German; while we in turn call on *our* God to justify *us*.

"Now, there cannot be two Gods—two real Gods—president over the actions of men. That were unthinkable. Of two claimants to that sceptre, one must be a pretender, an Anti-Christ.

"Therefore our first duty in this dreadful business is to clear our minds, to make sure that ours is truly the right God. Let us not trouble—for it is too late—about any German's mind. Our business is to clear our own vision.

"I confess to you that, however we clear it, I anticipate that what we see in the end is likely to be damaging to what I call 'official' Christianity. However you put it, the Churches of Europe (established or free) have been allowing at least one *simulacrum* of Christ to walk the earth, claiming holiness while devising evil. However you put it, the slaughter of man by man is horrible, and—more than that—our Churches exist to prevent it, by persuasion teaching peace on earth, good-will towards men.

"Disquieted, unable to sleep for this thought, I arose and dressed early this morning, and sat for a while on the wall opposite, gazing at this homely house of God across the roadway. It looked strange and unreal to me, there in the dawn; and (for Heaven knows I can never afford to slight the place it holds in my affection) I even dared in my fondness to reckon it with great and famous temples such as in our Westminster, in Paris, in Rheims—aye, and in Cologne—men have reared to the glory of God. I asked myself if these, too, looked impertinent as this day's sun took their towers, dawning so eventfully over Europe; if these, too, suffered in men's minds such a loss of significance by comparison with the eternal hills and the river that rushed at my feet refreshing this valley as night-long, day-long, it has run refreshing and sung unheeded for thousands of years.

"Then it seemed to me, as the day cleared, that whatever of impertinence showed in this building was due to *us*—and to me, more than any—who in these few years past have believed ourselves to be working for good, when all the while we have never cleared our vision to see things in their right proportions.

"We are probably willing to accept this curse of war as a visitation on our sins. But for *what* sins? O, beware of taking the prohibitions of the Decalogue in a lump, its named sins as *equivalent*! In every one of you must live an inward witness that these sins do not rank equally in God's eye; that to murder, for instance, is wickeder than to misuse the Lord's name in a hasty oath; that to bear false witness against a neighbour is tenfold worse than to break the Sabbath. Yet we for ever in our churches put these out of their

right order; count ourselves righteous if we slander our neighbour, so it be on the way to worship; and in petty cruelties practise the lust of murder, interrupting it to shudder at a profane oath uttered by some good fellow outside in the street. To love God and your neighbour, summed up, for Christ, all the Law and the Prophets: and his love was for the harlot and the publican, as his worst word always for the self-deceiver who thanked God that he was not as other men.

"I verily believe that in this struggle we war with principalities and powers, with the rulers of darkness in this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places. But make no mistake: the men who are actually going out from England to brave the first brunt for us are men whom *we* have not taught to die like heroes, who have little interest in Church or Chapel or their differences, who view sins in an altogether different perspective from ours; whom we enlisted to do this work because they were hungry and at the moment saw no better job in prospect: whom we have taught to despise us while they protect us.

"The sins of our enemy are evident. But if *we* say we have no sin, we shall deceive ourselves and the truth will not be in us."

"Did you ever hear a feebler or a more idiotic sermon?" demanded Mrs. Polsue of Miss Oliver on their way home down the valley.

"If ever a man had his chance to improve an occasion——"

"Tut! I say nothing of his incapacity. There are some men that can't rise even when 'tis a question

of all Europe at war. But did you hear the light he made, or tried to make, of Sabbath-breaking?"

"I didn't hear all that," Miss Oliver confessed: "or not to notice. It seemed so funny his getting up at that hour and dangling his legs on a wall."

"We will press to have a married man planned to us next time," said Mrs. Polsue. "A wife wouldn't allow it."

"Do you suppose he *smoked?*" asked Miss Oliver.

"I shouldn't wonder. . . . He certainly does it at home, for I took the trouble to smell his window-curtains; and at an hour like that, with nobody about——"

"There's such a thing as an All-seeing Eye, however early you choose to dangle your legs," said Miss Oliver.

CHAPTER V

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

JUST about seven o'clock next morning Nicky-Nan, who had breakfasted early and taken post early in the porchway to watch against any possible *ruse* of the foe —for, Bank Holiday or no Bank Holiday, he was taking no risks—spied Lippity-Libby the postman coming over the bridge towards him with his dot-and-go-one gait.

Lippity-Libby, drawing near, held out a letter in his hand and flourished it.

"Now don't excite yourself," he warned Nicky-Nan. "When first I seed your name 'pon the address I said to myself, 'What a good job if that poor fella's luck should be here at last, and this a fortun' arrived from his rich relatives in Canada!' That's the very words I said to myself."

"As it happens, I han't got no rich relatives, neither here nor in Canada," answered Nicky-Nan. "Is that letter for me or are you playin' me some trick?"

"A man of your descent," said Lippity-Libby, "can't help havin' relatives in great quantities dispersed about the world. I've figured it out, and the sum works like that old 'un we used to do on our slates about a horse-shoe. Your great-grandfather married your great-grandmother, and that set the ball rollin'—to go no farther back than the head will carry. Six sons an' daughters they had, for the sake of argyment, and

each married and had six again. Why, damme, by that time there's not a quarter in Europe where a rich chap deceased mayn't be croppin' up and leavin' you his money, for no better reason than that you're a Nanjivell. That always seemed to me one of the advantages of good birth. For my part," the postman continued, "my father and mother never spoke of such matters, though she was a Collins and married in Lanteglos parish, where I dare say the whole pedigary could be looked up, if one wasn't a postman and could spare the time. But in the long evenings since my poor wife's death I often find time to think of you, Mr. Nanjivell; bein' both of us lame of the right leg as it happens. Hows'ever 'tisn' no news o' riches for 'ee to-day, sorry as I be to say it: for the postmark's 'Polpier.'"

He tendered the letter. Nicky-Nan stretched out a hand, but drew it back on a sudden suspicion.

"No," he said. "You may take an' keep it. 'Tis a trick, I doubt."

"You can't mean that, surely?" Lippity-Libby eyed the letter almost greedily, holding it between finger and thumb. "Of course, if I thought you meant it—I don't remember gettin' more 'n three letters in all my life; that's if you don't count the trade they send me at election times, tellin' me where to put my cross. Three letters all told, and one o' they was after my poor Sarah died, threatenin' me about the rates, that had slipped out o' my head, she bein' in the habit of payin' them when alive. The amount o' fault she'd find in 'em, too, an' the pleasure she'd take in it, you'd never believe. I've often thought how funny she must be feelin' it up there—the good soul—with everything of

the best in lighting an' water, an' no rates at all—or that's how *I* read the last chapter o' Revelations. . . . Yes, only three letters of my own, that have handed so many to other people, with births, marriages, an' deaths, shipwrecks an' legacies an' lovin' letters from every port in the world. Telegrams too—I'd dearly like to get a telegram of my own. . . . But Government be a terrible stickler. You may call it red tape, if you will: but if Mrs. Pengelly caught me holdin' back any person's letter, even though I knowed it held trouble for 'en, she'd be bound to report me, poor soul, an' then like enough I'd lose place an' livelihood. So I thank 'ee, naybour, for bein' so forward to give me a bit o' pleasure; but 'twon't do—no, by the Powers Above it won't." He shook his head sadly. Then of a sudden his eye brightened. "I tell 'ee what, though. There's no rule of His Majesty's Service why I shouldn' stand by while you reads it aloud."

"No, no," said Nicky-Nan hastily. "Here, hold hard a moment—Is it in Pamphlett's hand-writin' by any chance?"

The question wounded Lippity-Libby's feelings, and he showed it. "As if I shouldn' ha' told you!" he protested, gently reproachful.

"Nor his clerk's?"

"What, Hendy?—Hendy makes all his long letters straight up an' down, while these be made with loops. The writin's sloped backwards too, with a rake on it, same as was fash'nable on some o' the tea-clippers in my young days, but now 'tis seldom carried 'nless by a few steam-yachts."

"Well, hand me over the thing—I'll risk it," said Nicky-Nan.

He took the missive and glanced at the address—"Mr. N. Nanjivell, *Naval Reservist,* Polpier R.S.O., Cornwall." The words "*Naval Reservist*" underlined gave him a tremor. But it was too late to draw back. He broke open the envelope, drew forth the letter, unfolded it, and ran his eye hurriedly overleaf, seeking the signature.

"Why, 'tisn' signed!"

"Not signed?" echoed Lippity-Libby. "That's as much as to say 'nonymous." Suddenly he slapped his thigh. "There now! O' course — why, what a forgetful head is mine! And simme I knew that hand, too, all the while."

"Eh?"

"Yes, to be sure—'tis the same that, up to two years ago, used to write an' send all the 'nonymous letters in Polpier. The old woman an' I, we tracked it down to one of two, an' both females. It lay between 'em, and I was for old Aun' Bunney—she bein' well known for a witch. But now that can't be, for the woman's gone to Satan these three months. . . . An' my missus gone too—poor tender heart—an' lookin' down on me, that was rash enough to bet her sixpence on it, an' now no means to pay up."

"Who was the other?" demanded Nicky-Nan, frowning over the letter, his face flushing as he frowned.

"You're goin' to read it to me, ben't you?"

"Damned if I do," answered Nicky-Nan curtly. "But I'd like to know who wrote it."

"It don't stand with Government reggilations, as *I* read 'em," said Lippity-Libby, "for a postman to be tellin' who wrote every 'nonymous letter he carries. . . . Well, I be wastin' time; but if you'll take my

advice, Mr. Nanjivell, and it isn' too late, you'll marry a woman. She'll probably increase your comfort, and —I don't care who she is—she'll work out another woman that writes 'nonymous. Like a stoat in a burrow she will, specially if she happens to take in washin' same as my lost Sarah did. She was shown a 'nonymous letter with 'Only charitable to warn' in it. Dang me, if she didn' go straight an' turn up a complaint about 'One chemise torn in wash,' an' showed me how, though sloped different ways, the letters were alike, twiddles an' all, to the very daps. I wouldn' believe it at the time, the party bein' a female in good position. But my wife was certain of it, an' all the more because she never allowed to her last breath that the woman's shimmy had been torn at all. Well, so long!"

Nicky-Nan carried the letter indoors to his small, dark sitting-room, and there spelled it through painfully, holding the paper close up to the window-pane. It ran:

Sunday, 2 8 14.

Mr. N. Nanjivell.

Sir,—As an inhabitant of Polpier, born in the town and anxious for its good name, besides being a ratepayer and one that pays taxes to His Majesty, I was naterally concerned to-day at your not taking your place along with the other men that went off to fight for their country. I am given to understand that you were served with a paper, same as the rest, and the Customs Officer was put out by your not going. I don't wonder at it. Such want of pluck.

Its no good your saying you are not Abel. If you are Abel to be a Reservist, and *draw pay*, you are Abel to Fight thats how I look at it. I would let you to know the Public

doesnt pay money for gamey legs that go about taking all they can get until the Pinch comes.

Theres a good many things want looking into in Po'pier. It has reached me that until the present sistem came in and put a stop to it you drew pay for years for drills that you never atended.

This is a time when as L[d] Nelson said England expects every Man to Do his Duty. I think so bad of your case that I am writing by same post to the Custom House at Troy about it. So I warn you as

A Well-Wisher.

Nicky-Nan read this amiable missive through, and re-read it almost to the end before realising the menace of it. At the first perusal his mind was engaged with the mechanical task of deciphering the script and with speculating on its authorship. . . . He came to the end with no full grasp of the purport.

His wits were dulled, too, being preoccupied—in spite of Lippity-Libby—with suspicions of Mr. Pamphlett. He recognised the hand of an enemy; and though conscious of possessing few friends in the world (none, maybe—he did not care how many or how few, anyway), he was aware of one only enemy—Pamphlett. He held this tenement which Pamphlett openly coveted: but what besides had he that anyone could envy? Who else could wish him worse off than he was? His broken past, his present poverty and daily mental anguish, his future *sans* hope—anyone who wanted these might take 'em and welcome!

But when, on the second reading, he reached the last paragraph but one, his heart stood still for a moment as if under a sudden stab.

Yes, . . . in the man or woman who had written

this letter he had an enemy who indeed wished him worse off than he was, and not only worse but much worse, who would take from him not only the roof over his head, but even the dreadful refuge of the Workhouse; who would hunt him down even into jail. That talk about his not going to the War was all nonsense. How could all the Coastguard or Custom-house Officers in Christendom force a man to go to the War with a growth under his thigh as big as your fist? Damn the War!—he'd scarcely given a thought to it (being so worried with other matters) until last night. He hadn't a notion, at this moment, what it was all about. But anyhow that stuff about "want of pluck" was silly nonsense,—almost too silly to vex a man. He would have gone fast enough had he been able. In truth, Nicky-Nan's conscience had no nerve to be stung by imputations of cowardliness. He had never thought of himself as a plucky man—it wasn't worth while, and, for that matter, *he* wasn't worth while. He had, without considering it, always found himself able to take risks alongside of the other fellows. Moreover, what did he amount to, with his destinies, hopes, and belongings all told, to be chary of losing them or himself?

But it was a fact, as the letter hinted, that some years ago, and for two successive seasons, the Reservists' training happening to fall at a time when fish was plentiful and all hands making money, he, with one or two other men, had conspired with a knavish Chief Officer of Coastguard to put a fraudulent trick on the Government. It was the Chief Officer who actually played the trick, entering them up as having served a course which they had never attended, and he kept their training pay as his price. What his less guilty

conspirators gained was the retention of their names on the strength, to qualify them in due time for their pensions.

This and other abuses of the old system had been abolished when the Admiralty decided that every reservist must put in his annual spell of training at sea. The trick at the time had lain heavily upon Nicky-Nan's conscience: but with time he had forgotten it. Since the new order came into force, he had fulfilled his obligations regularly enough—until the year before last, by which time his leg really disabled him. It had fortuned, however, that one afternoon on the Quay, loafing around less on the chance of a job (for odd jobs are scarce at Polpier) than to while away time, he had encountered Dr. Mant, the easy-going practitioner from St. Martin's. Dr. Mant fancying an excursion after the mackerel, at that time swarming close inshore, Nicky-Nan had rowed him out and back along the coast to St. Martin's. The bargain struck for half a crown, the doctor sent his trap back by road.

Some way out at sea he inquired, "Hallo! what's wrong with that right knee of yours?"

"Ricked it," answered Nicky-Nan mendaciously, and added, "I was thinkin' to consult you, sir. I be due for trainin' with the Reserve in a fortni't's time."

"Want a certificate? Here, let me have a feel what's wrong." The Doctor interrupted his whiffing for a moment to reach forward and feel Nicky-Nan's knee professionally, outside the thick sea-cloth trousers. "Hurts, does it? You've a nasty swelling there, my man."

"It hurts a bit, sir, and no mistake. If I could only have a certificate now——"

"All right; I'll give you one," said the Doctor, and turned his attention again to the mackerel.

Before stepping ashore at St. Martin's, he pulled out a fountain-pen and scribbled the certificate on a leaf torn from his notebook. Having with this and one shilling compounded for his trip, he said as he traced up his catch:

"There, stick that in an envelope and post it. You're clearly not fit for service afloat till that swelling goes down."

Nicky-Nan duly posted the certificate, which Dr. Mant had characteristically forgotten to date. After a week it came back with an official note drawing Nicky's attention to this, and requesting that the date should be inserted.

"Red tape," said Nicky. He borrowed a pen from Mrs. Penhaligon, and wrote the date quite accurately at the foot of the document.

Then, for some reason or other, his conscience smote him. He put off posting the letter; and at this point again fortune helped him. Word came to him by a chance wind that the staff of the Coastguard had been shifted, over at Troy. Also (though he never discovered this) the Chief Officer of Customs, after returning the certificate, had left for his summer holiday.

So Nicky Nan kept it in his pocket; and nothing happened.

The next year—so easy is the slope of Avernus—Nicky-Nan, who had felt many qualms over filling in a date which (though accurate) should by rights have been filled in by the Doctor, felt none at all in adding a slight twiddle of the pen which changed "1912" into

"1913"; by which he escaped again, and again went undetected.

It had all been contrived so easily, and had succeeded so easily! Everything said and done, his leg was worse. Any doctor alive, if brought in, would bear witness that it incapacitated him.

Also any man, who looks ahead, will fight for the pension which alone stands between him and the workhouse.

With such arguments Nicky-Nan had salved his conscience; and his conscience had slept under them.

Now in a moment, with eyes fixed on the fatal handwriting, he saw every bandage of false pretence, all his unguents of conscience, stripped away, laying his guilt bare to the world.

An enemy was on his track—one who knew and could call up fatal evidence.

The light in the window-pane had been growing darker for some minutes. The morning had broken squally, with intervals of sunshine. A fierce gust came howling up the little river between its leaning houses and broke in rain upon the bottle-glass quarrels of the window.

Nicky-Nan started, as though it were a hand arresting him.

CHAPTER VI

TREASURE TROVE

THE rain—the last, for many weeks, to visit Polpier—cleared up soon after midday. At one o'clock or thereabouts Nicky-Nan, having dined on a stale crust and a slice of bacon, and recovered somewhat from his first alarm (as even so frugal a meal will put courage into a man), ventured to the porch again for a look at the weather. The weather and the set of the wind always come first in a Polpier man's interest. They form the staple of conversation on the Quay-side. Fish ranks next: after fish, religion: after religion, clack about boats and persons; and so we come down to politics, peace and war, the manner of getting to foreign ports and the kind of people one finds in them.

Nicky-Nan could read very few signs of the weather from his dark little parlour. The gully of the river deflected all true winds, and the overhanging houses closed in all but a narrow strip of sky, prolonged study of which was apt to induce a crick in the neck. To be sure, certain winds could be recognised by their voices: a southerly one of any consequence announced itself by a curious droning note which, if it westered a little, rose to a sharp whistle and, in anything above half-a-gale, to a scream. But to *see* what the weather was like, you must go to the front porch.

Nicky-Nan went to the front porch and gazed skyward. The wind—as the saying is—had "catched in," and was blowing briskly from the north-west, chasing diaphanous clouds across the blue zenith. The roofs

still shone wet and dazzling, and there were puddles in the street. But he knew the afternoon was going to be a fine one. He took pleasure in this when, a few moments later, his ear caught the thudding of a distant drum. . . . Yes, yes—it was Bank Holiday, and the children would be assembling, up the valley, for the Anniversary Treat of the Wesleyan Sunday School. There would be wagons waiting to convey them up-inland to Squire Tresawna's pleasure-grounds—to high shaven lawns whereon, for once in the year, they could enjoy themselves running about upon the level. (In Polpier, as any mother there will tell you, a boy has to wear out his exuberance mostly on the seat of his breeches and bring it to a check by digging in his heels somewhere. And the wastage at these particular points of his tailoring persists when he grows up to manhood; for a crabber sits much on the thwart of a boat and drives with his heels against a stretcher. Thus it happens that three-fourths of Billy Bosistow's cobbling is devoted to the "trigging" of boot-heels, while the wives, who mend all the small-clothes, have long ago and by consent given up any pretence of harmonising the patch with the original garment. At Troy and at St. Martin's they will tell you that every Polpier man carries about his home-address on his person, and will rudely indicate where. Mrs. Penhaligon put it one day in more delicate proverbial form. "In a rabbit-warren," she said, "you learn not to notice scuts.")

While Nicky-Nan—who, as we have said, had a fondness for children—stood and eyed the weather with approval, Mrs. Penhaligon came bustling out, with her bonnet on.

"Lord sakes!" she exclaimed. "Be that the drum

already? What a whirl one does live in!—and if there's one thing I hate more'n another, 'tis to be fussed."

"What about the children, ma'am?"

"The children? . . . Gone on this half-hour, I should hope. 'Beida's a good gel enough, when once ye've coaxed her into her best things. It sobers her, you can't think. She'll look after 'Biades an' see that he don't put the paper with 'Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us' into his mouth, though 'tis where he puts most things."

"But you're goin' to the Treat yourself, ma'am?" Nicky-Nan suggested.

"What, in *this* rig-out? Catch me!" answered Mrs. Penhaligon, not with literal intention but idiomatically. "No, I'm but goin' up to see 'em off decent. But I wonder at you liggin' behind, when 'tis the only Bank Holiday randivoo this side o' Troy. . . ."

"'Tidn' for want o' will," Nicky-Nan answered ruefully and truthfully, with a downward glance, which reminded Mrs. Penhaligon to be remorseful.

"Eh, but I forgot . . . and you with that leg on your mind! But you'll forgive a body as has been these two days in a stirabout. And if you're fittin' to take a stroll before I get back, maybe you'll not forget to lock the house up."

Nicky-Nan promised. (He and the Penhaligons had separate keys of the main door.) He watched the good woman as she hurried on her way, tying her bonnet-strings as she went.

It occurred to him that, leg or no leg, he felt lonely, and would be all the better for a stroll. So, having fetched his stick and locked the house-door behind him, he dandered down towards the Quay. The street

was empty, uncannily silent. "It's queer now," thought Nicky-Nan, "what a difference childern make to a town, an' you never noticin' it till they're gone." All the children had departed—the happy little Wesleyans to climb on board the wagons, the small Church of England minority to watch them, and solace their envy with expectation of their own Treat, a more select one, promised for this-day-fortnight. Then would be *their* turn, and some people would live to be sorry that they went to Chapel. But a fortnight is a long time, and weather in the West is notoriously uncertain. Of course you cannot eat your cake and have it: but Mrs. Penhaligon arrived just in time to stop a fight between 'Bert and Matthey Matthew's ugly boy, who sang in the Church choir, and hoped it would rain. (*Odium theologicum.*)

The most of the mothers had departed also, either to "assist" at the Treat or to watch the embarcation: while those of the men whom the War had not claimed had tramped it over to Troy, which six weeks ago—and long before the idea of a European War had occurred to anyone — had advertised a small regatta for Bank Holiday, with an afternoon's horse-racing.

The tunding of the drum up the valley seemed to Nicky-Nan to emphasise the loneliness all about him. But down by the Quay-head he came in sight of Police-man Rat-it-all (so named from his only and frequent expletive), seated on a bollard and staring up at the sky.

Nicky-Nan hesitated: hung, indeed, for a moment, on the edge of flight. This was Bank Holiday, and until to-morrow's sunrise a constable was powerless as Satan in a charmed circle. Still, the man might have the ejectment order in his pocket—would, if not already

furnished with it, almost certainly know about it. On the other hand there was a chance—it might be worth while—to discover how much Rat-it-all knew. Forewarned is forearmed. Moreover, when your country is at war, and silence holds the city, there is great comfort in a chat. Nicky-Nan advanced with a fine air of nonchalance.

"Lookin' at the sky?" said he. "Wind's back in the nor'-west again. Which, for settled weather, I'd rather it took off-shore a bit later in the afternoon. It'll last though, for all that, I shouldn' wonder."

Policeman Rat-it-all withdrew his gaze from the firmament.

"I wasn' thinkin' of the wind," said he. "I take no account of the elements, for my part. Never did; and now never shall—havin' been born up to Bodmin, where the prison is."

"Oh!" said Nicky-Nan suspiciously; "what's it like?"

"Bodmin?" Policeman Rat-it-all seemed to reflect for a moment. "Well, I wouldn't just say it's altogether *like* any place in particular. There's a street, of course, . . . and there's the prison, and the barracks, and an asylum where they keep the lunatics, and a workhouse and what-not. But if you put to me, in so many words, what it's *like*——"

"I—I meant the prison," explained Nicky-Nan; that being the only feature of Bodmin in which he felt any instant concern.

"It's a place," answered Policeman Rat-it-all with painful lucidity, "where they shut people up. Sometimes there's an execution. But not often; not very often; once in a while, as you might say. There's a

monument, too,—upon a hill they call the Beacon. I'm very fond of Bodmin. It's the County Town, you know; and with these little things going on, in one way and another, why, that enlarges the mind."

"Does it so?" asked Nicky-Nan, a trifle puzzled.

"It do indeed," the constable assured him with conviction. "Take *me*, now, at this present moment, for instance. You comes upon me suddent, and what do you catch me doin'? You catches me,"—here his voice became impressive —"you catches me lookin' up at the sky. And why am I lookin' up at the sky? Is it to say to you, 'Nicholas Nanjivell, the wind is sot in the sou'-west'?"

"Not if you expect me to believe 'ee. 'Tisn' a point off north-an'-by-west."

"—Or," the constable continued, lifting a hand, "is it to say to you, 'It is sot in the *north*-west,' as the case may be? Or is it I was wastin' the day in idleness, same as some persons I could mention in the Force if there wasn' such a thing as discipline? Not so. I was lookin' up in the execution of my duty. An' what do you suppose I was lookin' for?"

"I'm sure I can't tell 'ee," answered Nicky-Nan after a painful effort at guessing. "It couldn' be for obscene language; nor yet for drunks."

Policeman Rat-it-all leant forward and touched him on the top button of his waistcoat.

"Zepp-a-lins!" he said mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"Zepp-a-lins!"

"Oh!"—Nicky-Nan's brow cleared—"You mean them German balloon things the papers make so much fuss about."

"Die-rigitable," added Rat-it-all. "That's the point."

"Well? . . . Have 'ee seen any?" Nicky-Nan lifted his gaze skyward.

"I won't go so far as to say that I've seen anything answerin' to that description knockin' about—not up to the present. But these are times when a man must keep his eyes liftin' if he doesn' want Old England to be taken with what the newspapers call a Bolt from the Blue."

"I've come across the expression," said Nicky-Nan.

"Well, what I say is, Down here, in this corner of the world—though, mind you, I'm not sayin' anything against it—you don't *reelise* things: you reely don't. Now I come from Bodmin, as I think I must have told you."

"You did."

"Where you see the soldiers goin' about with the stripes down their trousers: but they've done away with that except for the Yeomanry (which is black, or dark blue, I forget which), and that's how you know the difference. So your mind gets enlarged almost without your knowin' it, and you feel what's at stake."

"I wonder you didn' want to enlist," said Nicky-Nan.

"I did: but I was too tall—too tall *and* too strong," sighed the policeman, bending his arm and causing his biceps to swell up mountainously. "You haven't a notion how strong I am—if, for instance, I took it into my head to catch you up and heave you over the Quay here. Yes, yes, I am wonderfully well made! And on top of that, Mother picked up some nonsense against soldiering off a speaker at a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon. There was nothing for it but the Force. So here I AM. But give me the wings of a dove, and I'd join the Royal

Flyin' Corps to-morrow, where they get higher pay because of the risk, same as with the submarines. If you ask *me*, every Englishman's post at this moment is in the firing line."

Nicky-Nan winced, and changed the subject in haste.

"Well, it must be a great consolation to have such strength as yours," he said pleasantly. "But I wonder —with nothing else doin', and on a Bank Holiday too— you could manage to stay away from the School Treat."

"Rat it all!" broke out the constable, and checked himself. "I thought I was igsplaining to you," he went on as one who reasons patiently with an infant, "that a man has to think of something above an' beyond *self* in these days."

"I never found time to think out the rights an' wrongs o' warfare, for my part," said Nicky-Nan.

"Ah, I dare say not." Policeman Rat-it-all blew out his chest. "It's a deep subject," he added, wagging his head solemnly. "A very deep subject; and I quite understand your not having time for it lately. How about that Ejectment Order?"

Nicky-Nan jumped like a man shot. "Ha—have you got the—the thing about 'ee?" he twittered. "Don't tell me that Pamphlett has got 'em to send it down? . . . But there, you can't do anything on a Bank Holiday, anyway."

"Have I got the thing about me?" echoed the policeman slowly. "You talk as if 'twas a box o' matches. . . . Well, I may, or I mayn't; but anyways I've followed the case before Petty Sessions; and if you haven't a leg to stand on, the only thing is to walk out peaceably. Mind, I'm puttin' it unofficial, as between friends."

"And what if I don't?"

"Then, rat it all!—I mean," the constable corrected himself to a tolerant smile and gazed down on his mighty hands and arms—"then I got to put you into the street."

Nicky-Nan leaned on his stick and the stick shook with his communicated fury. "Try it—try it—try it!" he blazed out. "Try it, you Bodmin fathead!"

He shuffled away, nodding his head with wrath. He roamed the cliff-paths for an hour, pausing now and again to lean his back against an out-cropping mass of rock and pass the back of his hand across his eyes, that at first were bloodshot with fury. He had a great desire to kill Policeman Rat-it-all. As his passion died down and he limped forward, to pause and again limp forward, his gait and the backward cast of his eye were not unlike those of a hunted hare.

He reached the house door at nightfall, just as Mrs. Penhaligon came shepherding her offspring home down the dusky street. 'Biades had yielded to the sleep of exhaustion, and lay like a log in his mother's arms. 'Bert, for no other reason than that he had tired himself out, was sulky and uncommunicative. But 'Beida—whose whole manner ever changed when once she had been persuaded into fine clothes—wore an air of sustained gentility.

"Squire Tresawna keeps seven gardeners," she reported. "He has three motor-cars and two chauffeurs. The gardeners keep the front lawn so short with their mowing-machines that 'Biades couldn't possibly have made the front of his blouse in the mess it is unless he had purposely crawled on his stomach to lower me in the eyes of all. When it got to a certain point I pre-

tended to have no connection with him. There was nothing else to do. Then he felt sorry and wanted to hug me in front of everybody. . . . Oh, thank you . . . yes, I've enjoyed myself very much! Mrs. Tresawna wears a toque: but I suppose that when you get to a certain position you can carry on with toques long after everyone else has given them up. She had two maids; one of them in a grey velours dress that must have been one of Mrs. Tresawna's cast-offs, for it couldn't possibly have come out of her wages; though, by the fit, it might have been made for her."

A little before ten o'clock Nicky-Nan climbed the stairs painfully to his bedroom, undressed in part, and lay down—but not to sleep. For a while he lay without extinguishing the candle — his last candle. He had measured it carefully, and it reached almost to an inch beyond the knuckle of his forefinger. It would last him a good two hours at least, perhaps three.

He lay for a while almost luxuriously, save for the pain in his leg, and watched the light flickering on the rafters. They had a few more days to abide, let Pamphlett's men be never so sharp: but this was his last night under them. His enemies—some of them until this morning unsuspected—were closing in around him. They had him, now, in this last corner.

But that was for to-morrow. The very poor live always on the edge of to-morrow; and for that reason the night's sleep, which parts them from it, seems a long time.

After all, what could his enemies do to him? If he sat passive, the onus would rest on them. If Policeman Rat-it-all flung him into the street, why then in

the street he would sit, to the scandal of Polpier. If, on the other hand, Government claimed him for a deserter, still Government would have to fetch a cart to convey him to jail: his leg would not allow him to walk. Of wealth and goods God Almighty had already eased him. *Cantat vacuus* . . . He slid a hand under the bed-clothes and rubbed the swelling on his leg, softly, wondering if condemned men felt as little perturbed—or some of them—on the eve of execution.

He ceased rubbing and lay still again, staring up at the play of light on the rafters. Fine old timbers they were . . . solid English oak. Good old families they had sheltered in their time; men and women that feared God and honoured the King—now all gone to decay in churchyard, all as cold as homeless fellows. The Nanjivells had been such a family, and now—what would his poor old mother think of *this* for an end? Yet it was the general fate. Pushing men, your Pamphletts, rise in the world. Old families go down, . . . it couldn't be worked else. If he had only been born with *push*, now! If it could only be started over again, . . . if he had been put to a trade, instead of being let run to sea——

He broke off to wonder at the different things the old beams had looked down upon. Marriages, births —and deaths. The Old Doctor (he knew) had died in the fore-room, for convenience—the room where the Penhaligons slept: and even so, the family had been forced to lift the coffin in and out of the window, because of that twist in the stairs. There wasn't that difficulty with people's coming *into* the world. No doubt in its time this room must have seen a mort of births too. . . . And the children? All gone, the

same way! Drizzle o' rain upon churchyard graves. . . . "And you, too,"—with a flicker of his closing eyelids threatening the flicker on the beams—"you, too, doomed, my billies! Pamphlett'll take *me* to-morrow, *you* the day after; as in time the Devil'll take him and his!"

Nicky-Nan rolled over on his side and, perceiving the candle to be burnt down to a short inch, hastily blew it out. Almost in the act of relaxing the elbow on which he had raised himself for this effort he dropped asleep to his pillow.

For three hours he lay like a log. Then his troubled brain began to reassert itself. At about two in the morning he sat bolt upright in his bed. For twenty minutes or so he had been thinking rather than dreaming, yet with his thought held captive by sleep.

He reached for his matchbox and struck a light. . . . The whole world was after him, hunting him down, tearing down the house above his head! . . . Well, he would go down with the house. Pamphlett, or Government, might take his house; but there was the old hiding-cupboard to the right of the chimney-breast. . . .

When they summoned him to-morrow, he would have vanished. Only by uncovering his last shelter should they discover what was left of him. He would perish with the house.

He lit the candle and carried it to the cupboard; opened this, and peered into the well at his feet: lifted one of the loose bottom-boards, and, holding himself steady by a grip on the scurtain, thrust a naked leg down, feeling into vacancy.

The ball of his foot touched some substance, hard

and apparently firm. He supposed it to be a lower ceiling of the hole, and, after pressing once or twice to make sure, put all his weight upon it.

With a creak and a rush of masonry the whole second flooring of the cupboard gave way beneath him, leaving his invalid leg dangling, in excruciating pain. But that the crook of his elbow caught across the scurtain (shooting darts as of fire up the jarred funny-bone), he had made a part of the avalanche, the noise of which was enough to wake the dead. Luckily, too, he had set his candle on the planching floor, just wide of the cupboard entrance, and it stood burning as though nothing had happened.

With pain which surely must be worse than any pain of death, he heaved himself back and on to the bedroom floor again. The cascade of plaster, timber, masonry, must (he judged) have shot itself straight down into his parlour below.

He picked up the candle, and warily—while his leg wrung him with torture at every step—crept down the stairs to explore.

The parlour door opened inwards. He thrust it open for a short way quite easily. Then of a sudden it jammed: but it left an aperture through which he could squeeze himself. He did so, and held the candle aloft.

While he stared, first at a hole in the ceiling, then at the "scree" which had broken through it and lay spread, fan-shaped, on the solid floor at his feet, he heard a footstep, and Mrs. Penhaligon's voice in the passage without.

"Mr. Nanjivell! Is that Mr. Nanjivell?"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Oh, what has happened?"

"Nothing, ma'am. Only a downrush of soot in the chimney," answered Nicky-Nan, gasping: for the heap of dust and mortar at his feet lay scattered all over with golden coins!

"But the noise was terrible. I—I thought for sure it must be the Germans," came in Mrs. Penhaligon's voice.

"Nothing of the sort. You exaggerate things," answered Nicky-Nan, commanding his voice. "A rush of soot down the chimney, that's all. I've been expectin' it for weeks."

"You mustn't mind my bein' easily alarmed—left alone as I be with a family——"

"Not in the least, ma'am." Nicky-Nan resolutely closed the door and lifted his candle to confirm the miracle.

The candle, which had been guttering, shot up one last flame and died on a flicker of gold.

CHAPTER VII

"QUID NON MORTALIA PECTORA . . ."

A MOMENT later Nicky-Nan took a step to the door, half-repentant, on an impulse to call Mrs. Penhaligon back and bid her fetch a candle. God knows how much of subsequent trouble he might have spared himself by obeying that impulse: for Mrs. Penhaligon was a woman honest as the day; and withal had a head on her shoulders, shrewd enough—practised indeed—in steering the clumsy male mind for its good.

But, as we have recorded, Nicky-Nan, having suffered in early life from a woman, had been turned to a distrust of the sex; a general distrust which preoccupied with its shadow the bright exception that, on a second thought, he was ready enough to recognise in Mrs. Penhaligon.

This second thought came too late, however. He took one step towards the door, guided by the glimmer, beneath it, of her retreating candle. His hand even fumbled for the latch, and found it. But a sudden shyness seized him and he drew back. He heard her footsteps creaking on the party-stairs: heard the sound of her door softly closed, then the sound of a bolt thrust home in its socket; and turned to face darkness.

His brain worked quite clearly. He guessed well enough what had happened. In his youth he had often listened, without taking note of their talk, while his elders debated how it came about that the Old

Doctor had left, beyond some parcels of real estate—cottage property for the most part, the tenants of which were notoriously lax in paying their rents—but a very few personal effects. There were book debts in an inordinate mass; and the heirs found an inordinate difficulty in collecting them, since the inhabitants of Polpier—a hardy sea-faring race—had adopted a cheerful custom of paying for deliverance from one illness when they happened (if ever they did) to contract another: and this custom they extended even to that branch of medical service which by tradition should be rewarded in ready money. ["I always," explained a Polpier matron, "pays 'en ver one when I engages 'en ver the next; an' the laast I'll never pay ver"—and she never did.] On top of this, Polpier folk argued that doctoring wasn't, like property, a gift which a man could pass on to his heirs, and most certainly not if they happened to be—as they were—a cornfactor and an aged maiden sister of independent but exiguous means. "As *I* look at it," someone put this argument, on the Quay, "th' Old Doctor's mastery was a thing to hisself, and a proper marvel at that. Us brought nothin' into the world, my sons, an' us can't carry nothin' out: but that don't mean as you can leave it behind—leastways, not when it takes the form of professional skill. . . . Why, put it to yourselves. Here's th' old man gone up for his reward: an' you can hear th' Almighty sayin', 'Well done, thou good an' faithful servant.'"—"Amen," from the listeners.—"Yes, an' 'The labourer is worthy of his hire,' and what not. 'Well, then,' the Lord goes on, flatterin'-like, 'what about that there talent I committed to 'ee? For I d' know *you*'re not the sort to go hidin' it in a napkin.'

An' d' 'ee reckon th' old chap'll be cuttin' such a figure as to own up, 'Lord, I left it to a corn-merchant'? Ridic'lous to suppose! . . . *The Lord giveth, an' the Lord taketh away.* . . . With cottage property, I grant 'ee, 'tis another thing. Cottage property don't go on all-fours."

Nicky-Nan, then, guessed well enough what had happened. Almost in a flash he had guessed it.

He had surprised the Old Doctor's secret, hidden all these years. Folks used to make hoards of their money in the bygone days, when Napoleon threatened to invade us and deposit banks were scarce. And the Doctor, by all that tradition told, was never a man to break a habit once formed. For more than the span of two generations this wealth had lain concealed; and now *he* —*he*, Nicholas Nanjivell—was a rich man, if only he played his cards well!

With how sure an instinct he had clung to the old house!—had held on to this relic of a past gentility to which by rights he belonged!

He was a rich man now, and would defy Pamphlett and all his works—

> How pleasant it is to have money, heigho!
> How pleasant it is to have money!—

if only he knew how much!

And yet . . . Although philosophers in all ages have descanted on the blessings of Hope, and the part played by Imagination in making tolerable the business of living—so that men in the mass not only carry life through with courage but will turn and fight desperately for it, like stags at bay — it is to be doubted if one in ten ever guesses how constantly he is sustained by this

spirit scorning the substance, gallantly blind, with promises lifting him over defeat. I dare to say that, save for the strength of hope it put into him, this wealth so suddenly poured at Nicky-Nan's feet, doubled his discomfort, physical and mental.

Of his physical discomfort, just now, there could be no question. He could not find courage to leave his trove and climb the stairs back to his bedroom. Someone might rob him while he slept, and—horror!—he would never even know of how much he had been robbed. The anguish in his leg forbade his standing sentry: the night wanted almost three hours of dawn. Shirt and trousers were his only garments.

He knelt and groped on the stone floor to a corner clear of the fallen rubbish. On his way his fingers encountered a coin and clutched it—comfort, tangible proof that he had not been dreaming. He seated himself in the corner, propping his back there, and fell to speculating—sensing the coin in his palm, fingering it from time to time.

The Old Doctor had always, in his lifetime, been accounted a well-to-do man. . . . Very likely he had started this hoard in Bonaparte's days, and had gone on adding to it in the long years of peace. . . . It would certainly be a hundred pounds. It might be a thousand. One thousand pounds!

But no—not so fast! Put it at a hundred only, and daylight would be the unlikelier to bring disappointment. The scattered coins he had seen by that one brief flash of the candle danced and multiplied themselves before his eyes like dots of fire in the darkness. Still he resolutely kept their numbers down to one hundred.

A hundred pounds! . . . Why, that, or even fifty, meant all the difference in life to him. He could look Pamphlett in the face now. He would step down to the Bank to-morrow, slap seven sovereigns down on the counter—but not too boldly; for Pamphlett must not suspect—and demand the change in silver, with his receipt. Full quittance—he could see Pamphlett's face as he fetched forth the piece of paper and made out that quittance, signing his name across a postage stamp.

Not once in the course of his vision-building did it cross Nicky-Nan's mind that the money was—that it could be—less than legitimately his. Luck comes late to some men; to others, never. It had come late to him, yet in the nick of time, as a godsend. His family and the Old Doctor's had intermarried, back along, quite in the old days; or so he had heard. . . . Nicky-Nan knew nothing of any law about treasure-trove. Wealth arrived to men as it befell or as they deserved; and, anyway, "findings was keepings." His notion of other folks' concern in this money reached no further than a vague fear of folks in general—that they might rob him or deprive him of it in some way. He must go to work cautiously.

Thus out of despair Fortune lifted him and began to install him in fear.

He must go to work *very* cautiously. Being all unused to the possession of money, but accustomed to consider it as a weapon of which fortunate men obtained a hold to employ it in "besting" others less fortunate, he foresaw endless calls upon his cunning. But this did not forbid his indulging in visions in which—being also at bottom good-natured—he pictured himself as

playing the good genius in his native town, earning general gratitude, building in a large-handed way the new pier that was so badly needed, conferring favours right and left, departing this life amid the mourning of the township, perchance (who could tell?) surviving for the wonder of generations to come in a carved statue at the Quay-head. He had observed, in the ports he had visited abroad, such statues erected in memory of men he had never heard tell of. It would be a mighty fine thing—though a novelty in Polpier—to have one's memory kept alive in this fashion. . . . He would lord it in life too, as became a Nanjivell—albeit the last of the race. To the Penhaligon family he would be specially kind. . . . Upon other deserving ones he would confer surprising help by stealth. . . . He wished now that, in spite of experience, he had married and begotten children—an heir at least. It would be a fine thing to restore the stock to a prospect of honour. He wondered that in the past he had never realised his plain duty in this light and taken the risk. As it was, the old name could only be preserved in a commonalty's gratitude.

The flagged floor galled him cruelly; for he was of lean build. Shift his posture or his weight as he might, after a few seconds' ease his haunch-pins were pressing again upon the pavement, with no cushion of flesh but a crushed nerve or two that kept telephoning misery to his knee and fetching fierce darts of pain for response. A quick succession of these, running into one as though a red-hot iron had been applied under the thigh, searing it to the very bone, stabbed suddenly into his brain with a new terror. He had forgotten the anonymous letter and its threat!

He was a rich man now. The business of a rich man was to stay at home and preserve his riches while making use of them—like Pamphlett. Who in this world ever heard of a rich man being hauled off to serve in the Navy as a common seaman? The thing was unprecedented. He could buy himself out; at the worst by paying up the money he had drawn.

Yes, but this would involve disclosing his wealth, and the source of it. . . . He was terribly afraid of publicity. He had enemies, as the letter proved: he suspected that the law itself might be another enemy—you could never predict which side the law would take—and between them, if they got to know his secret, they would despoil him. . . . On the other hand if, covering his secret, he opposed but a passive resistance, they might carry him off to jail, and then all this money would be laid bare to the world. Intolerable exposure!

He must hide it. . . . He must count it, and then —having staved off Pamphlett—hide it to-morrow with all speed and cunning. When would the dawn come?

The sun, in the longitude of Polpier, was actually due to rise a few minutes before five o'clock. But Polpier (as I have told) lies in a deep cleft of the hills. Nicky-Nan's parlour looked out on a mere slit at the bottom of that cleft; and, moreover, the downfall of plaster blocked half the lower portion of its tiny dirty window.

What with one hindrance and another, it was almost a quarter past five before daylight began to glimmer in the parlour. It found him on his knees—not in prayer, nor in thanksgiving, but eagerly feeling over the grey pile of rubbish and digging into it with clawed fingers.

An hour later, with so much of daylight about him as the window permitted, he was still on his knees. Already he had collected more than a hundred golden coins, putting them together in piles of twenty.

The dawn had been chilly: but he was warm enough by this time. Indeed, sweat soaked his shirt; beads of sweat gathered on his grey eyebrows, and dripped, sometimes on his hands, sometimes on the pile of old plaster—greyish-white, and fine almost as wood-ash—into which they dug and dug, tearing the thin laths aside, pouncing on each coin brought to the surface.

Once only—though the kneeling cost him torture, and the sweat came no less from anguish than from exertion—did he pause and straighten himself up to listen. Upstairs the Penhaligon children had awakened with the daylight and were talking—chirruping like sparrows—before they left their beds—

> Hey! now the day dawis;
> The joly cock crawis . . .

—but Nicky-Nan toiled on in his dim parlour, collecting wealth.

By eight o'clock he had picked up and arranged—still in neat piles of twenty—some eight hundred coins of golden money. His belly was fasting: but he had forgotten the crust in the cupboard. Had he not here enough to defray a king's banquet?

Someone tapped on the door. Nicky-Nan, startled, raised himself upright on his knees and called in a tremor—

"No admittance!"

As he staggered up and made for the door, to press

his weight against it, Mrs. Penhaligon spoke on the other side.

"Mr. Nanjivell!"

"Ma'am?"

"The postman, with a letter for you! I'll fetch it in, if you wish: but the poor fellow'd like a clack, I can see."

It jumped to his tongue to bid her fetch and pass it in to him under the door. The outside of a letter would not tell her much, and anyhow would excite less curiosity than his own corporal envelope, begrimed as it was just now with dust and plaster and cobwebs. But the end of her message alarmed him with misgivings more serious. "Why should Lippity-Libby want a clack with him? . . . Just for gossip's sake? —or to convey a warning?" Lippity-Libby knew, or averred that he knew, the author of yesterday's anonymous letter. . . .

"Tell him I'll be out in a moment!"

Nicky-Nan beat his hands together softly to rid them of the worst of the plaster, then smoothed them briskly down his chest in a hasty effort to remove the cobwebs that clung there. The result—two damning smears on the front of his shirt—was discouraging.

He opened the door with great caution, peered out into the passage, and found to his great relief that Mrs. Penhaligon, that discreet woman, had withdrawn to her own premises.

He would have reconnoitred farther, but in the porch at the end of the passage Lippity-Libby stood in plain view, with the street full of sunshine behind him. So Nicky-Nan contented himself with closing the door carefully and hasping it.

"If," began Lippity-Libby, "you go on gettin' letters at the rate o' one a day, there's only two ways to it. Either you'll practise yourself not to keep the King's postman waitin', or you'll make it up afterwards in the shape of a Christmas-box. . . . I ought in fairness to tell you," Lippity-Libby added, "that there *is* a third way—though I hate the sight of it—and that's a letter-box with a slit in the door. Parson Steele has one. When I asked 'en why, he laughed an' talked foolish, an' said he'd put it up in self-defence. Now, what sort o' defence can a letter-box be to any man's house? And that was six months afore the War, too!"

"Another letter for me?" Nicky-Nan hobbled forward, blinking against the sunlight.

"'Ho-Haitch-Hem-Hess'—that means 'On His Majesty Service'; post-mark, Troy. . . . Hallo!—anything wrong wi' the house?"

"Eh?"

"Plasterin' job?"

Nicky-Nan understood. "What's that to you?" he asked curtly.

"I don' know how it should happen," mused Lippity-Libby after a pause of dejection; "but the gettin' of letters seems to turn folks suspicious-like all of a sudden. You'd be surprised the number that puts me the very question you've just asked. An' they tell me that 'tis with money the same as with letters. I read a tract one time, about a man that found hisself rich of a sudden, and instead o' callin' his naybours together an' sayin' 'Rejoice with me,' what d'ye think he went an' did?"

"Look here," said Nicky-Nan, eyeing the postman

firmly. "If you're hidin' something behind this clack, I'll trouble you to out with it."

"If you don't *want* the story, you shan't have it," said Lippity-Libby, aggrieved. "'Tis your loss, too; for it was full of instruction, an' had a moral at the end in different letterin'. . . . You're upset this mornin', that's what you are: been up too early an' workin' too hard at that plasterin' job, whatever it is." The little man limped back into the roadway and cricked his head back for a gaze up at the chimneys. "Nothing wrong on this side, seemin'ly. . . . Nor, nor there wasn't any breeze o' wind in the night, not to wake me. . . . Anyways, you're a wonderful forgivin' man, Nicholas Nanjivell."

"Why so?"

"Why, to be up betimes an' workin' yourself cross, plasterin' at th' old house, out o' which—if report's true—you'll be turned within a week."

"Don't you listen to reports; no, nor spread 'em. Here, hand me over my letter. . . . 'Turn me out,' will they? Go an' tell 'em they can't do it—not if they was to bring all the king's horses and all the king's men!"

"And *they* be all gone to France. There! there! As I said to myself only last night as I got into bed—'What a thing is War!' I said, 'an' o' what furious an' rummy things consistin'—marches to an' fro, short commons, shootin's of cannon, rapes, an' other bloodthirsty goin's-on; an' here we be in the midst thereof! That's calkilated to make a man *think*.' . . . But I must say," said Lippity-Libby, eyeing the sky aloft, "the glass is goin' up stiddy, an' *that's* always a comfort."

As the old man took his departure, Nicky-Nan broke the seal of his letter, opened it, and read:

To NICHOLAS NANJIVELL,
R.N.R., Polpier.

TROY, *August 3rd*, 1914.

I am advised that you have failed to join the Royal Naval Reserve Force called into Active Service under the Act 22 and 23 Vict. c. 40; nor have you reported yourself at the Custom-House, St. Martin's, Cornwall, as required on the Active Service Paper, R.V. 53, duly delivered to you.

Before filling up your description on Form R.V. 26a (R.N.R. Absentees and Deserters) I desire that you will let me know the cause of your non-compliance with H.M. summons; and, if the cause be sickness or other disablement, that you will forward a medical certificate *immediately*, as evidence of same, to

JOSHUA JOHNS,
Registrar, Royal Naval Reserve.

CHAPTER VIII

BUSINESS AS USUAL

"BUSINESS as usual!" said Mr. Pamphlett heartily to his clerk Mr. Hendy, as he let himself in at 9.40 by the side door of the Bank. Mr. Hendy lived on the premises which his wife served as caretaker, with a "help" to do the scrubbing.

Mr. Hendy, always punctual, stood ready in the passage, awaiting his master. He received Mr. Pamphlett's top-hat and walking-stick, helped him off with his black frock-coat, helped him on with the light alpaca jacket in which during the hot weather Mr. Pamphlett combined banking with comfort.

"Business as usual!" said Mr. Pamphlett, slipping into the alpaca. "That's the motto. Old England's sound, Hendy!"

"Yes, sir: leastways, I hope so."

"Sound as a bell. It's money will put us through this, Hendy, as it always has. We mayn't wear uniforms"—Mr. Pamphlett smoothed down the alpaca over his stomach—"but *we're* the real sinews of this War."

Mr. Hendy—a slight middle-aged man, with fluffy straw-coloured hair which he grew long above his ears, to compensate for the baldness of his cranium—answered that he was glad Mr. Pamphlett took it in so hearty a fashion, but for his part, if it wasn't for the Missus, he was dying to enlist and have a slap at the Germans.

Mr. Pamphlett laughed and entered his private office. Here every morning he dealt with his corres-

pondence; while Hendy, in the main room of the Bank, unlocked the safe, fetched out the ready cash and the ledgers, and generally made preparations before opening the door for business on the stroke of ten.

Five or six letters awaited Mr. Pamphlett. One he recognised by envelope and handwriting as a missive from headquarters: and he opened it first, wondering a little, pausing, as he broke the seal, to examine the post-marks. "Yesterday had been Bank Holiday. . . . But, to be sure, in these times the Head Office would very likely be neglecting Bank Holidays, the clerks working at high pressure. . . ."

But no: the London post-mark bore date "Aug. 1." The letter had been received and delivered at Polpier on the 2nd, and had been lying in the bank letter-box for two whole days.

He broke the seal in some trepidation: for he had spent the last sixty hours or so of national emergency on a visit with Mrs. Pamphlett to her brother-in-law, a well-to-do farmer, who dwelt some twelve miles inland. Here Mr. Pamphlett, after punctual and ample meals, had gently stimulated digestion with hot brandy-and-water (which never comes amiss, even in August, if you happen to be connected with farming and have duly kept the Sabbath), and had sat with one leg crossed over the other, exchanging—rather by his composed bearing than in actual words—confidence in Britain's financial stability against confidence in her agriculture. His presence had somewhat eased a trying situation at Lawhilly Farm, where his young fool of a nephew—an only son, too—fired by the war, had gone so far as to distress his parents with talk of enlisting.

"Business as usual!" had been Mr. Pamphlett's

advice to the young man. "There was, for a day or two—I won't deny it—a certain—er—tendency to what I may call *nervousness* in the City. Can we wonder at it, holding as we do so many—er—threads?" Mr. Pamphlett held up his two hands, and spread them as though they contained a skein of wool to be unwound. "But the Chancellor of the Exchequer took steps. Opposed as I am in a general way to the present Government, I am free to admit that, at this juncture, the Chancellor of the Exchequer realised his responsibilities and — er — took steps. Markets may — er — fluctuate for some weeks to come—may, as I would put it, exhibit a certain amount of—er—unsteadiness. But we shall tide that over, easily—as I am advised, quite easily. Great Britain's credit is solid; that's the word, *solid*: and if that—er—solidarity holds true of our monetary system with"—here Mr. Pamphlett expanded and contracted his fingers as if gathering gossamers—"its delicate and far-reaching complexities . . . That was an excellent duck, James," said he, turning to his brother-in-law. "I don't remember when I've tasted a better."

"Maria believes in basting, I thank God," said his brother-in-law, Farmer Pearce, acknowledging the compliment. "'Tis a more enterprisin' life you lead by the sea, if your business calls you that way. You pick up more money—which is everything in these days—and you see the ships and yachts going to and fro, and so forth. But you can't breed ducks for table. Once they get nigh to tidal water, though it be but to the head of a creek, the flesh turns fishy, and you can't prevent it. We must set it down to Natur', I suppose. But inland ducks for me!"

"Maria has a great gift with the stuffing, too. . . . You're spoilt, Ebenezer—and so too is Obed here—up in this fat of the land, though you don't know it. Eh?" said Mr. Pamphlett sharply as his nephew Obed, who had been sitting by and listening sulkily, made an impatient movement—"But as I was going on to say, if we, that hold (as I may put it) the threads of commerce in these times, believe in sitting solid, why surely the same applies—only more so—to agriculture."

"Which is the backbone of Old England," interposed Farmer Pearce, "an' always has been."

"There's two ends to most backbones," put in young Obed, who had been tracing patterns with his fingers on the surface of the mahogany table. "And I don't pretend to have the cleverer one. But I don't want the other to be kicked into doin' summat; which is what'll happen to us farmin' chaps if we don't start enlistin'."

"The aggericultural community," persisted his father, who had picked up that resonant term at meetings of the Farmers' Union, "is, an' always has been, the backbone of England."

"Then 'tis time we showed it, in the Yeomanry."

"I wish you'd hold your tongue on that word; when you know your mother never hears it spoke but she wakes me up at night with the palpitations. . . . We *be* showin' it, I tell 'ee! We *be* doin' something for our country in this here crisis. Why, didn' Squire Tresawna ride over but yesterday an' commandeer Tory an' Pleasant?—that's my two best wagon-hosses," the farmer explained to his brother-in-law. "An' didn' he say as most likely he'd be over again, inside a fortni't, after light draught hosses for the Artillery?

I don't murmur, for my part. We must all be prepared to make sacrifices in these times. But all I say is, you can't pick up draught hosses—light *or* heavy—off a greengrocer, nor yet off a bird-fancier; an' the man who says you can, I'll tell him to his face he's no better than a liar," concluded Farmer Pearce, suddenly growing crimson in the face, and smiting the table with unnecessary heat.

"If the hosses be goin', why should the men linger?" young Obed urged. "An' I don't see what you sacrificed either, over Tory an' Pleasant; for you told me yourself the Squire gave a very fair price for 'em."

"Well, an' I should hope so! You don't reckon as I was goin' to make Government a present of 'em, do 'ee?—a man rated up to the ears, as I be!" Here he glanced nervously at his brother-in-law, who (as a town-dweller) held the monstrous belief that farmers enjoyed their share, and even a little more, of relief from rating, and had more than once shown argumentative fight on this subject in the piping times of peace. But Mr. Pamphlett tactfully ignored the challenge.

"Listen to me, Obed," he put in. "By what I hear from London, as well as what I read in the papers, the most serious question before this country just now is to maintain—or, as I might put it, to keep up—an adequate supply of foodstuffs. To which end," pursued Mr. Pamphlett, in the weighty periods of the "leading article" from which he had gathered this information, "it appears to us—I mean, to me—that our agricultural friends would be well advised, at this juncture, in considering the advisability, as well as the feasibility, of restoring a quantity of their pasture-land to an arable condition, and cultivating it *as* such. The

Board of Agriculture, it is understood, will shortly issue a circular—er—on these lines. Now you cannot effect the change thus indicated without labour——"

"Or hosses."

"That there Board of Agriculture," put in the farmer, "is always settin' up to know us farmers' business better than we d' know it ourselves. Grow wheat—must we? All very well, an' for my country's good I'm willin' enough, provided it can be done at a profit. Will Government guarantee *that*? . . . No, brother Pamphlett: what you say about your callin', I says about mine. 'Business as usual'—that's my word: an' let Obed here be a good son to his mother an' bide at home, defyin' all the Germans in Christendom."

Mr. Pamphlett, then, had spent his week-end in rural comfort, and with the consciousness of being useful —a steadying influence in a household threatened by youthful restlessness, which (Heaven knew) might so easily turn to recklessness. His wife, too, was devotedly attached to her sister, whose heart had always been liable to palpitations. But he realised at sight of the letter, which had been lying so long in the box, that a phrase is not everything: that "business as usual," while it might serve as a charm or formula against panic in the market-place, and even sustain in private many a doubting soul accustomed to take things on trust, was an incantation something less than adequate to calm the City of London, or the Bank directors and their confidential clerks, who maybe had been working in a frenzy through Sunday and Bank Holiday in their closed offices at headquarters. For a moment Mr. Pamphlett realised this, and it gave him a scare. In the

act of opening the letter he cast his eyes around on the chance that a telegram had followed the letter, demanding to know the cause that took him from his post at this crisis. But there was no telegram. The envelope held two enclosures. He scanned them hurriedly: the blood came back to his face, and he was a man again.

The first enclosure merely acknowledged, in conventional words, the receipt of certain returns posted by him last Friday. The second ran:

New Bank Premises: Polpier Branch.

DEAR SIR,—With reference to the above, the Board has had under consideration your letter of the 23rd ult.; and directs me to say that, in the present unsettled situation abroad, and the consequent need of strict watchfulness over capital expenditure (however small), it may be wise to defer the issuing of tenders, as suggested by you, until further notice.

The Board has, in its confidence, entrusted you with almost complete discretion in this matter; and possibly you may find it difficult, at this juncture, to delay matters as suggested. If so, please advise.—Yours faithfully,

WALTER P. SCHMIDT,
Managing Director.

So *that* was all right! It might defer building operations, but it need not defer his dealing with Nanjivell, his own tenant, who paid nothing. He could turn Nanjivell out, and then—well, whenever the Bank chose to start building, the Directors (having gone so far) would no doubt consider the length of time the premises had been standing idle.

His brow cleared. He opened the next letter, with the handwriting of which he was familiar enough.

One Retallack, a speculative builder, suggested a small increase on his overdraft, offering security. This would not do, in War time. Mr. Pamphlett dealt with it at once:

DEAR SIR,—You are doubtless aware that the outbreak of a European War compels the Banking Houses to look jealously after all advances, or extensions of credit, even the smallest.

It is not so much a question of declining this new request on your part as of reconsidering very carefully the present position of your acct. I will satisfy myself concerning this and advise you without delay.—I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

ALFRED PAMPHLETT,
Manager.

"Business as usual"—Mr. Pamphlett repeated it many times to himself as he went through the rest of his correspondence. His spirit—in revulsion after his brief scare—soared almost to gaiety. He walked into the main room of the Bank as Hendy started to pull the door-bolts.

"We don't open for business to-day, Hendy."

Hendy had shown himself flatly incapable of understanding the Moratorium; what it was or how it worked. Mr. Pamphlett, for his part, was uncertain about the details. But he explained them to Hendy.

Then he returned to his private office, pausing by the rack in the passage to draw from the tail pocket of his frock-coat there a folded copy of *The Western Morning News*. There was something furtive in his action: he would have started guiltily had he been surprised in it, even by the meek Hendy.

Business—well, business could not be altogether as usual in these times. As a rule Mr. Pamphlett read his paper through, before and during breakfast, and left it at home for Mrs. Pamphlett to scan the births, deaths, and marriages, the "wanteds," the Court Circular, and any report there might happen to be of a colliery explosion (she specialised in colliery explosions: they appealed to her as combining violent death with darkness) before interviewing the cook. But to-day, with all Europe in the melting-pot—so to speak—Mr. Pamphlett had broken his rule. He craved to know the exact speed at which Russia was "steam-rolling." There was a map in the paper, and it might repay study.

Before studying the map his eye fell on a paragraph headed "Rise in Prices." He paused and spent some time over this.

He was still conning it when the door opened, and Hendy appeared. Mr. Pamphlett muttered "Consols," and refolded the newspaper hastily.

"Nanjivell is here to see you, sir: at the side door. 'Says he must speak to you in private."

"Oh . . . confound Nanjivell! I've had enough of that man. . . . Very well; but tell him I can't spare a moment over five minutes."

Hendy ushered in Nicky-Nan, who hobbled forward to the table, hat in hand.

"Good-morning, Nanjivell!" said Mr. Pamphlett.

"'Mornin', sir."

"Another plea, I suppose?—when you had my word on Saturday that I'd done with you."

"'Tain't that."

"Then what is it? . . . For I hardly suppose 'tis to pay up—rent *and* arrears."

"One — two — three — four — five — six — seven!" Nicky-Nan dived in his pocket for the fistful of coins, picked them out carefully, and laid them one by one on the table. "I'll take the change an' a receipt, if you please."

"How came you by this money?" asked the Bank Manager, after a pause, staring at the gold.

"What the hell is that to you?" demanded Nicky-Nan.

For a moment Mr. Pamphlett made no reply. Then he leaned forward and picked up one of the coins.

"I asked," he said, "because one of these happens to be a guinea-piece—a spade guinea, and scarcely worn at all."

"'Tis as good as a sovereign's worth, hey?"

"Certainly: worth more in fact."

"I'll trust 'ee for the difference then," said Nicky-Nan. "As for how I came by it, I came by it honest, an' that's enough. A man o' my family may have a bit o' hoard put by—by his forefathers."

"I see," said Mr. Pamphlett thoughtfully. "Hendy shall make out the receipt. But this doesn't include costs of the ejectment order, you know."

"I'll bring 'em to-morrow, if you'll let me know the amount."

"Hendy shall give you a note of it. . . . No—to be fair, the ejectment order still stands against you. I have power to turn you out to-morrow."

"But you won't!"

"If you use that tone with me, my man, I certainly will. If you take your receipt and clear out, I may relent so far as to give you a short grace."

When Nicky-Nan had taken his leave, Mr. Pamphlett

picked up the spade guinea, and considered it curiously. It had a beautifully sharp impression, and might have been minted yesterday. He thought it would go very well on his watch-chain.

Then he opened the paper again, sought out the paragraph headed "Rise in Prices," and read it through, pausing now and again to pencil a note or two on the back of an envelope.

On his way homeward in the dinner-hour he called at Mrs. Pengelly's shop and gave that good woman an order for groceries. The size of it almost caused her to faint. It ran into double figures in pounds sterling.

"Business *as* usual!" repeated Mr. Pamphlett to himself complacently, as he pursued his way up the hill.

CHAPTER IX

THE BROKEN PANE

During his interview with Mr. Pamphlett, Nicky-Nan had been in a fever to get back to his parlour. It had no lock to the door, and goodness knew what the Penhaligon children might not be up to in these holiday times. Also he could not rid his mind of a terror that his wealth might prove, after all, to be fairy gold, and vanish in air.

It was a relief in a way to find that Mr. Pamphlett, after ringing each coin on his table, had accepted the seven pieces for currency. But this business of the spade-guinea raised a new scare to agitate him.

In a confused way he remembered that in building the coins into piles he had found some of them to be broader than others, so that their edges overlapped, and that for symmetry he had sorted these broader pieces out and stacked them apart. Of the last ten he had made a mixed pile,—four broad coins at the base, six narrower ones above; and from this he had taken, purely by chance, the seven topmost to pay his debt—that is to say, six sovereigns and one guinea-piece. Luck had stood his friend. A pretty business, had he gone to the banker with seven of those old-fashioned guineas!

Mr. Hendy had handed him five shillings and four-pence change with his quittance, and on his way home he made a detour to hobble into Mr. Gedye's shop—

"S. Gedye, Ironmonger and Ship-Chandler"—and purchase two staples, a hasp, and a stout padlock, with key.

Mr. Gedye, selecting these articles with a care that was slow torture to his customer, opined that the weather was settled at last, and trusted it would assist the Russians in mobilising. The slower Mr. Gedye became, the more ardently he repeated an expression of hope that the Russians would hurry up.

"Once they get going——" said Mr. Gedye, and pulled out a drawerful of staples so far that it upset and spilled its contents in an avalanche on the dark floor behind the counter. "I knew a ship's captain once, a Russian that married a woman over to Troy and would go to sleep for a week on end every time he came home from a voyage. His wife would wake him up and give him tea: that was all he took—tea without milk, between the sheets. He had been a Radical over in his own country, and the Radical agent over to Troy got wind o' this an' took steps to naturalise him. It took seven years. . . . But put him on deck in a gale o' wind and a better skipper (I'm told) you wouldn' meet in a day's march. When he got up an' dressed, he'd dander down to the butcher's an' point to the fatty parts of the meat with the end of his walking-stick, which was made out of a shark's backbone, if you ever! In my experience, a very quiet nation until roused. . . . Well, the Kaiser's done it this time—*and* a padlock I think you said? An uncomfortable man — that's my opinion of him, and I've never seen cause to change it. Now, for a padlock, here is one I can thoroughly recommend, with two keys, so that you can lose one and still have the other, which is often a convenience.

Yu'll be lockin' up your 'taty-patch, Mr. Nanjivell, against the Germans? Well, a very proper precaution."

"One can't be too careful in these times," said Nicky-Nan with feigned artlessness.

"No, indeed! Anything I can do for 'ee in the way of barbed wire?"

"No, I thank 'ee." Nicky-Nan's eyes had been wandering around the shop. "But I'll take this small sieve, now I come to think on it."

"Certainly, Mr. Nanjivell. One-an'-three. Shall I send it for 'ee? No?—an' nothing further to-day? Then one-an'-three and one is two-an'-three, an' two two's four, two-an'-seven, screws and staples two two's, two-an'-eleven. If you ask my opinion we're in for settled weather."

Nicky-Nan's business had taken time—some twenty minutes in excess of his calculations, as a glance at the sky informed him. (He carried no watch.) He hurried home in a twitter of nervousness, which increased as he drew near to his front door. In the passage he stumbled against a pail of water, all but upsetting it, and swore under his breath at his evil luck, which had deferred Mrs. Penhaligon's weekly scrubbing to Tuesday (Bank Holiday being a *dies non*).

On entering the parlour he drew a breath of relief. No one had visited it, to disturb it. The threadbare tablecloth rested as he had spread it, covering the piles of gold; the tattered scrap of carpet, too, hiding (so far as it might) the scree of fallen rubbish.

On this rubbish, after assuring himself that his treasure was safe, he fell to work with the sieve; making as little noise as might be, because by this time Mrs.

Penhaligon had begun operations on the brick flooring of the passage. Mrs. Penhaligon's father had been a groom in Squire Tresawna's service, and she had a trick of hissing softly while she scrubbed, as grooms do in washing-down and curry-combing their horses. He could hear the sound whenever her brush intromitted its harsh *whoosh-whoosh* and she paused to apply fresh soap. So they worked, the man and the woman—both kneeling—with the thin door between.

Nicky-Nan felt no weariness as yet. He used his coal-scraper to fill the sieve, and shook the fine powdery lime into one heap, and gently tilted the coarse residuum upon another, after searching it carefully over. At the end of an hour's labour he had added two guinea-pieces and nine sovereigns to his collection.

He vaguely remembered having been told—long ago by somebody—that sovereigns had first come into use back in the last century, not long after the battle of Waterloo; that in more ancient times gold had been paid in guineas; that guineas were then worth much more than their face value, because of the great amount of paper money; that Jews went about buying them up for twenty-three or twenty-four shillings; that, over at Troy, a Jew had been murdered and robbed of a lot of these coins by the landlord of a public-house.

He reasoned from this—and rightly, no doubt—that the Old Doctor had started his hoard in early life, when Boney was threatening to invade us; and had kept up the habit in later and more prosperous years, long after the currency had been changed. That would account for the sovereigns being so many and the guineas by comparison so few.

He was aching sorely in back and reins: his leg, too,

wanted ease. . . . He would take a rest and spend it in examining the window, by which alone he could get rid of the rubbish without courting inquiry. It was his only postern gate.

It had not been opened for many years—never, indeed, in the time of his tenancy. Door and fireplace had provided between them all the ventilation he was conscious of needing.

It cost him three minutes to push up the lower sash. He managed to open it some ten inches, and then, as a protest against this interference with its gradual decay, the sash-cord broke. He heard with a jump of the heart the weight thud down behind the woodwork: then, as he groped hastily behind him for a brick, to prop the sash, it came down with a run, and closed its descent with a jar that shook out two of its bottle-panes to drop into the water that rushed below. Prompt upon this came a flutter and scurry of wings in water, and a wild quacking, as a bevy of ducks dashed for shore.

A casement window was thrust open on the far side of the stream. A woman's voice shrilled:

"That's *you*, is it? Oh, yes—you Penhaligon children! You needn' clucky down an' hide—an' after breakin' Mr. Nanjivell's windows, that hasn' sixpence between hisself an' heaven, to pay a glazier!"

(But it was Mr. Nanjivell himself who cowered down out of sight, clutching the woodwork of the window-sill with wealth behind him surpassing the dreams of avarice.)

"Proper young limbs you be," the voice went on. "With no father at home to warm 'ee!"——

(Let this not be mistaken for a tribute to Mr. Penhaligon's parental kindness, good father though he was.

To "warm" a child in Polpier signifies to beat him with a strap.)

"—And him in danger of submarines, that snatch a man before his Maker like a snuff of a candle, while you can find no better way of employing your holidays than scatterin' other folks' glass to the danger o' my ducks! You just wait till I've wiped my arms, here, and I'll be round to tell your mother about 'ee!"

Nicky-Nan had recognised the voice at once. It belonged to Mrs. Climoe, possibly the champion virago of Polpier, and a woman of her word—a woman who never missed an opportunity to make trouble. Her allusion to wiping her arms before action he as swiftly understood. The window across the stream belonged to Mrs. Climoe's wash-kitchen. Again he cursed the luck that had interposed Bank Holiday and adjourned the washing operations of Polpier.

But he must defend himself: for Mrs. Climoe never promised anything which—if it happened to be unpleasant—she did not punctually perform. With swift cunning he snatched up his parcel of staples and screws, caught at a poker, and made a leap for the door.

Here luck aided him. Mrs. Penhaligon had finished her scrubbing and carried her pail out to the porch. There she met Mrs. Climoe's first accost, and it surprised her beyond measure: for her children were down upon the Quay playing. By rights they should have returned half an hour before: it was, indeed, close upon dinner-time. But she had been in the passage for a whole hour, with just an interval now and then for a dive into the kitchen to see how the pasties were cooking. She felt morally sure that they could not

have returned without her knowing it. They usually made her so exceedingly well aware of their return.

Under Mrs. Climoe's onslaught of accusation she wheeled about in bewilderment, at the sound of hammering, to perceive Nicky-Nan at the end of the passage, driving a staple into his doorpost with blows of a poker.

"There now! What did I tell you?" persisted Mrs. Climoe, attempting to thrust herself past.

"This is my house," retorted Mrs. Penhaligon, bravely heading her off. "If my children—but I could take my oath, here afore th' Almighty——"

"You ask Mr. Nanjivell! Why d'ee reckon he's puttin' a lock on his doorway, 'nless 'tis to prevent what I'm tellin' you from happenin' again?"

Mrs. Penhaligon stared about her. She went to the kitchen, she passed through the kitchen to the inner room. . . . No children! She came down the passage and close behind Nicky-Nan (who continued to hammer hypocritically), she gazed up the stairway and called "'Bert! 'Beida! You naughty children —come down this moment!" Still no answer.

She turned upon Nicky-Nan. "If they're really here and have been breakin' your glass——"

"You never heard no complaint from *me*, ma'am," answered Nicky-Nan, still intent on fixing his staple.

"Oh!" interposed Mrs. Climoe viciously, "if you two are colleaguin' already to hush something up, the affair lies between you, of course. It seems odd to me, Maria Penhaligon, an' your proper husband not two days gone to the wars. But if Nicholas Nanjivell here, chooses to play father to the fatherless an' cover up the sins of the children that go an' break his parlour

windows afore my very eyes, well, 'tisn't for me to say more than I hope no harm'll come of it."

She was preparing to say more. If she said more, Nicky-Nan did not hear it. For at this moment the three Penhaligon children broke in at the porch, burst past Mrs. Climoe, and clung to their mother, clamouring for dinner.

In the hubbub Nicky-Nan meanly slipped back to his den, closed the door, and dragged two chairs against it. Then he took a worn tea-tray and propped it against the window, blocking the broken panes. It seemed to him that the world had suddenly grown full of eyes, peering upon him from every side.

CHAPTER X

THE VICAR'S MISGIVINGS

MRS. STEELE, the Vicar's wife—a refined, shy little woman, somewhat austere in self-discipline and her own devotional exercises, but incapable of harsh judgment upon any other living soul—had spent Bank Holiday in writing letters and addressing them (from a list drawn up in long consultation with her husband) to "women-workers" of all denominations in the parish, inviting them to meet in the Vicarage drawing-room at 3.30 P.M. on Wednesday, to discuss "what steps (if any) could be taken to form sewing-parties, ambulance classes, etc.," and later to partake of afternoon tea.

The list was a depressing one, and not only because it included the names of Mrs. Polsue and Miss Oliver. "It makes my heart sink," Mrs. Steele confessed. "I hadn't realised till now, dear, how lonely we are—after five years, too—in this parish. Three out of every four are Nonconformists. It seems absurd, my taking the chair," she added wistfully. "Most likely they will wonder—even if they don't ask outright—what business I have to be showing the lead in this way."

The Vicar kissed his wife. "Let them wonder. And if they ask—but they won't, being West-country and well-mannered—I shall be here to answer."

"I wish you would answer them before they start to ask. That would be running no risks. A few words from you, just to explain and put them at their ease——"

He laughed. "Cunning woman!" said he, addressing an invisible audience. "She means, 'to put *her* at her ease,' by my taking over the few well-chosen remarks expected of the chairwoman. . . . My dear, I know you will be horribly nervous, and it would be easy enough for me to do the talking. But I am not going to, and for two reasons. To begin with, you will do it better——"

"My *dear* Robert!"

"Twice as effectively—and all the more effectively if you contrive to break down. *That* would conciliate them at once; for it would be evident proof that you disliked the job."

"I don't quite see."

"The religion of these good people very largely consists in shaping their immortal souls against the grain: and I admire it, in a sense, though on the whole it's not comparable with ours, which works towards God by love through a natural felicity. Still, it is disciplinary, and this country will have great use for it in the next few months. To do everything you dislike, and to do it thoroughly, will carry you quite a long way in wartime. The point at which Protestantism becomes disreputable is when you so far yield to loving your neighbour that you start chastising his sins to the neglect of your own. I have never quite understood why charity should begin at home, but I am sure that discipline ought to: and I sometimes think it ought to stay there."

"That Mrs. Polsue has such a disapproving face! . . . I wonder she ever brought herself to marry."

"If you had only been following my argument, Agatha, you would see that probably she had no time

for repugnance, being preoccupied in getting the poor fellow to do what he disliked. . . . Secondly——"

"Oh! A sermon!"

"Secondly," pursued the Vicar with firmness, "this War is so great a business that, to my mind, it just swallows up—effaces—all scruples and modesties and mock-modesties about precedence and the like. If anyone sees a job that wants doing, and a way to put it through, he will simply have no time to be humble and let another man step before him. The jealousies and the broken pieces of Etiquette can be left to be picked up after the smoke has cleared away; and by that time, belike, they will have cleared away with the smoke. Do you remember that old story of Hans Andersen's, about the gale that altered the signboards? Well, I prophesy that a good many signboards will be altered by this blow, up and down England, perhaps even in our little parish. If it teach us at all to see things as they are, we shall all be known, the rest of our lives, for what we proved ourselves to be in 1914."

"I saw in this morning's paper," said Mrs. Steele, "that over at Troy they have an inn called the 'King of Prussia,' and the Mayor and Corporation think of changing its name."

"Yes," said her husband gravely; "the Kaiser wrote to the Town Clerk suggesting the 'Globe' as more appropriate; but the Town Council, while willing to make some alteration, is divided between the 'Blue Boar' and the 'Boot.' . . . But that reminds me. If I am to attend your meeting, let us call in the Wesleyan Minister as a set-off. There's nothing makes a woman's meeting so womanly as a sprinkling of ministers of religion."

"Robert, you are talking odiously, and you know it. I hate people to be satirical or sarcastic. To begin with, I never understand what they mean, so that I am helpless as well as uncomfortable."

The Vicar had taken a step or two to the bay-window, where, with hands thrust within his trouser-pockets he stood staring gloomily out on the bright flower-beds that, next to the comeliness and order of her ministering to the Church—garnishing of the altar, lustration of the holy vessels, washing and mending of vestments,—were the pride of Mrs. Steele's life.

> "See how the flowers, as at parade,
> Under their colours stand display'd:
> Each regiment in order grows,
> That of the tulip, pink, and rose. . . .
> O thou, that dear and happy Isle,
> The garden of the world erstwhile,
> Thou Paradise of the four seas
> Which Heaven planted us to please,
> But, to exclude the world, did guard
> With wat'ry, if not flaming, sword; . . .
> Unhappy! shall we never more
> That sweet militia restore?
> When gardens only had their towers,
> And all the garrisons were flowers. . . ."

He murmured Marvell's lines to himself and, with a shake of the shoulders coming out of his brown study, swung round to the writing-table again.

"Dear, I beg your pardon! . . . The truth is, I feel savage with myself: and, being a condemned non-combatant, I vented it on the most sensitive soul I could find, knowing it to be gentle, and taking care (as you say) to catch and render it helpless." He

groaned. "Yes, yes—I am a brute! Even now I am using that same tone which you detest. You do right to detest it. But will it comfort you a little to know that when a man takes that tone, often enough it's because he too feels helpless as well as angry? 'Mordant' is the word, I believe: which means that the poor fool bites *you* to get his teeth into himself."

She rose from her writing-chair and touched him by the arm.

"Robert!" she appealed.

"Oh, yes—'What is the matter with me?' . . . Nothing—or, in other words, Everything—that is to say, this War."

"It's terrible, of course; but I don't see——" She broke off. "Is it the War itself that upsets you, or the little we can do to help? If *that's* your trouble, why, of course it was silly of me to worry you just now about my being nervous of facing these people. But we're only at the beginning——"

"Agatha!" The Vicar drew a hand from his pocket, laid it on his wife's shoulder, and looked her in the eyes. "Don't I know that, if the call came, you would face a platoon? It's I who am weak. This War——" He stared out of the window again.

"It is a just War, if ever there was one. . . . Robert, you don't doubt *that*, surely! Forced on us—— Why, you yourself used to warn me, when I little heeded, that the Germans were preparing it, that 'the Day' must come sooner or later: for they would have it so."

"That's true enough."

"So positive about it as you were then, proving to me that their Naval Estimates could spell nothing else!

. . . And now that it has come, what is the matter with *us*? Have *we* provoked it? Have *we* torn up treaties? Had you, a week ago—had anyone we know—the smallest desire for it?"

"Before God, we had not. The English people—I will swear to it, in this corner of the land—had no more quarrel with the Germans than I have with you at this moment. Why, we saw how the first draft—the Naval Reservists—went off last Sunday. In a kind of stupor, they were. But wars are made by Governments, Agatha; never by peoples."

"And our Government—much as I detest them for their behaviour to the Welsh Church—our Government worked for peace up to the last."

"I honestly believe they did. I am sure they did . . . up to the last, as you say. The question is, *Were they glad or sorry when they didn't bring it off?*"

"Robert!"

"I am trying—as we shall all have to try—to look at things as they are. This trouble has been brewing ever since the South African War, . . . and for ten years at least Germany has been shaping up for a quarrel which we have hoped to decline. On a hundred points of preparation they are ready and we are not; they have probably sown this idle nation with their spies as they sowed France before 1870: they make no more bones about a broken oath or two to-day than they made about forging the Ems telegram. They are an unpleasant race,—the North Germans, at least—and an uncivilised——"

"They make the most appalling noises with their soup. . . . Do you remember that German baron at the *table d'hôte* at Genoa?"

"The point is that, with all their thoroughness in plotting, they have no *savoir faire*; they are educated beyond the capacity of their breeding; and the older, lazier, civilised nations have—as the saying is—caught the barbarian stiff. It is—as you choose to look at it—a tragedy of tactlessness or a triumph of tact; and for our time, anyway, the last word upon the Church of Christ—call it Eastern or Western, Roman, Lutheran, or Anglican."

Mrs. Steele looked at her husband earnestly. "If you believe that——"

"But I do believe it," he interrupted.

"If you believe that," she persisted, "I can understand your doubting, even despairing over a hundred things. . . . But below it all I feel that you are angry with something deeper."

"Eh?"

"With something in yourself."

"Yes, you're right," he answered savagely. "You shall know what it is," said he, on the instant correcting himself to tenderness, "when I've taken hat and stick and gone out and wrestled with it."

As luck would have it, on his way down the hill he encountered Mr. Hambly, and delivered his message.

"The notion is that we form a small Emergency Committee. Here at home, in the next few weeks or months, many things will want doing. For the most important, we must keep an eye on the wives and families whose bread-winners have gone off to fight; see that they get their allotments of pay and separation allowances; and administer as wisely as we can the relief funds that are already being started. Also the ladies

will desire, no doubt, to form working-parties, make hospital shirts, knit socks, tear and roll lint for bandages. My wife even suggests an ambulance class; and I have written to Mant, at St. Martin's, who may be willing to come over (say) once a week and teach us the rudiments of 'First Aid' on the chance—a remote one, I own—that one of these days we may get a boat-load of wounded at Polpier. I'll admit, too, that all these preparations may well strike you as petty, and even futile. But they may be good, anyhow, for our own souls' health. They will give us a sense of helping."

Mr. Hambly took off his spectacles and wiped them, for his eyes were moist. "Do you know," said he, smiling, "that I was on my way to visit you with a very similar proposal? . . . Now, as you are a good thirty years younger than I, and, moreover, have been springing downhill while I have been toiling laboriously up——" He glanced down at his club foot.

—"That I took duty for you and did the long-windedness," put in the Vicar with a laugh. "And I haven't quite finished yet. The idea is (I should add) that, as in politics, so with our religious differences, we all declare a truce of God. In Heaven's name let us all pull together for once and forget our separation of creeds!"

The Minister rubbed his eyes gently: for the trouble, after all, seemed to be with them and not with his spectacles.

"And I ought to add," said he, "that the first suggestion of such a Committee came from the ladies of my congregation. The only credit I can claim is for a certain obstinacy in resisting those who would have confined the effort to our Society. . . . Most happily I managed to prevail—and it was none the easier

because I happen just now to be a little out of odour with some of the more influential members of what I suppose must be termed my 'flock.'"

"Yes: I heard that your sermon last Sunday had caused a scandal. What was it you said? That, in a breakdown of Christianity like the present, we might leave talk of the public-houses and usefully consider Sunday closing of churches and chapels—or something of the sort."

"Was it in that form the report reached you?" the Minister asked with entire gravity. "There is an epigrammatist abroad in Polpier, and I have never been able to trace him—or her. But it is the truth—and it may well have leaked out in my discourse—that I feel our services to have lost their point and our ministrations their savour. . . . I—I beg your pardon," he corrected himself: "I should have said '*my* ministrations.'"

"Not at all. . . . Do you suppose I have not been feeling with you—that all our business has suddenly turned flat, stale, unprofitable?"

"It is a natural discouragement. . . . Let us own it to none until we have found our hearts again. I see now that even that hint of it in my sermon was a momentary lapse of loyalty. Meanwhile I clutch on this proposal of yours. It will give us all what we most want—a sense of being useful."

The Vicar stepped back a pace and eyed him. Then, on an impulse—

"Hambly," he said, "you have to hear Confession. I am going to tell you something I have kept secret even from my wife. . . . I have written to the Bishop asking his permission to volunteer for service."

"May God bring you safely back, my friend! If I were younger. . . . And the Army will want chaplains."

"But I am not offering myself as a chaplain."

"How, then?"

"I am asking leave to *fight*. . . . Don't stare, man; and don't answer me until you have heard my reasons. Well, you have read your newspaper and must have noted how, all over Britain, the bishops, clergy, and ministers of all denominations are turning themselves into recruiting sergeants and urging men to fight. You note how they preach this War as a War in defence of Law, in defence of Right, against Might, a War for the cause of humanity, a War for an ideal. In to-day's paper it has even become a War against War. . . . Well, if all this be true, why should I as a priest be denied my share in the crusade? Why should I be forbidden to lay down my life in what is, to these people, so evidently my Master's service? Why should it be admirable—nay, a fundamental of manhood—in Tom and Dick and Harry to play the Happy Warrior life-size, but reprehensible in *me*? Or again, look at it in *this* way.—You and I, as ministers of the Gospel, have gone about preaching it (pretty ineffectively, to be sure) for a Gospel of Peace. Well now, if these fellows are right, it turns out that we have been wrong all the time, and the sooner we make amends, by carrying a gun, the better. Anyway—priest or no priest—I have in me certain scruples which deter me from telling Tom or Dick or Harry to take a gun and kill a man, and from scolding him if he is not quick about it, while I myself am not proposing to take the risk or earn the undying honour—or the guilt—whichever it may be."

"My mind moves slowly," said the Minister after a pause, during which the Vicar drew breath. "And often, when confronted in a hurry with an argument which I dislike but see no present way to controvert, I fall back for moral support on the tone of the disputant. . . . I have a feeling at this moment that you are in the wrong, somewhere and somehow, because you are talking like an angry man."

"So my wife assured me, half an hour ago. . . . Then let me put it differently and with a sweet reasonableness. If this War be a Holy War, why may I not share actively in it? Or on what principle, if the military use of weapons be right for a layman, should it be wrong for a clergyman? What differentiates us?"

"In a vague way," said the Minister, "I see that a great deal may differentiate you. Suppose, now, I were to ask what separates you from a layman, that you should have a right, which you deny him, to pronounce the Absolution. You will answer me, and in firm faith, that by a laying-on of hands you have inherited—in direct succession from the Apostles—a certain particular virtue. You know me well enough by this time to be sure that, while doubting your claim, I respect its sincerity. . . . It is a claim, at least, which has silently endured through some hundreds of generations of men, to reassert itself quietly, times and again, after many hundreds of accesses of human madness. . . . I do not press the validity of *my* mission, which derives what sanction it may merely from a general spiritual tradition of the race. But yours is special, you say; by it *you* are consecrated, separated, reserved. Then if you are reserved to absolve men of their sins, may you not be rightly reserved against sharing in their combats?"

"I am hot," the Vicar acknowledged; "and in my heat the most I can manage is sarcasm. But I have the grace to hope that in process of time I shall acquire the sweeter temper of irony."

A dull thud shook the atmosphere overhead, and was followed some four seconds later by another and louder reverberation. The two men, startled for a moment, smiled as they collected their thoughts. "That means security, not danger."

"Gun-practice. We were warned of it by advertisement in this morning's paper. A 9·4-inch gun, by the sound of it—and there goes another. A battle-cruiser at least!—Shall we walk out to the cliffs for a sight of her?"

CHAPTER XI

THE "THREE PILCHARDS"

"Boo-oom!" echoed Un' Benny Rowett on the Quay, mocking the noise of the cannonade. "War—bloody war, my hearties! There goes a hundred pound o' taxpayers' money; an' there go all our pilchards for this season, the most promisin' in my recollection."

"He'll be tellin' us," suggested a humorist, "that the British Navy is firin' on pilchards, in the hope there may be a submarine somewhere amongst 'em."

"I never rose to the height o' puttin' myself into the enemy's mind," retorted Un' Benny; "which they tell me, in the newspapers, is the greatest art o' warfare. I be a modest man, content with understandin' pilchards; and if you'd ever taken that trouble, Zack Mennear—Boo-oom! there it goes again!—you'd know that, soon as they hear gunfire, or feel it—for their senses don't tally with mine, or even with yours—plumb deep the fish sink. Th' Old Doctor used to preach that, when sunk, they headed back for Americy; but seein' as they sunk, and out o' reach o' net, I never could see the matter was worth pursooin'. The point is, you an' me'll find ourselves poorer men by Christmas. And that's War, and it hits us men o' peace both ways. Boo-oom!—plunk goes one hundred pounds o' money to the bottom o' the sea; an' close after it goes the fish! You may take my word—'tis first throwin' away the helve and then the hatchet. I could never see any sense in War, for my part; an' I remember bein' very

much impressed back at the bye-election by a little man who came down uninvited in a check ulster and a straw hat. The Liberal Committee disowned him, and he was afterwards taken up an' give three months at Quarter Sessions for payin' his board an' lodgin' somewhere with a fancy cheque. But he was most impressive, even convincin', while he lasted; and I remember to this day what he told us about the South African War. 'That War, my friends,' he said, 'has cost us, first an' last, two hundred an' fifty millions of money—and 'oo *paid* for it? *You an' me.*' Boo-oom! once more! That's the way the money goes,—an', more by token, here comes Pamphlett to know what the row's about, an' with the loose cash, I'se wage, fairly skipping in his trouser-pockets."

Sure enough, Mr. Pamphlett, as the cannonade shook the plate-glass windows of his bank, had started up in some alarm, and was sallying forth to seek reassurance. For again the inner sheet of the newspaper, with its reports of the mobilisation of armies and of embassies taking flight from various European capitals, had engaged all his attention, and he had missed the advertisement columns.

On his way to ask news of the group of fishermen at the Quay-head he hurried—and almost without observing him—past Nicky-Nan; who likewise had hobbled forth to discover the meaning of the uproar, and, having discovered it, had retired to seat himself on the bollard outside the "Three Pilchards" and nurse his leg.

"What's this firing about?" asked Mr. Pamphlett, arriving in a high state of perspiration. "I—I gather, from the cool way you men are taking it, that there's no cause for alarm?"

Now Un' Benny, who found it hard as a rule to bear ill-will toward any living creature, very cordially disliked Mr. Pamphlett—as indeed did most of the men on the Quay. But whereas the dislike of nine-tenths of Polpier was helpless as the toad's resentment of the harrow—since the banker held the strings of sundry Fishing Companies, and was a hard taskmaster—Un' Benny, with a few chosen kinsmen, had preserved his independence.

"The kings o' the earth rise up together, sir," answered Un' Benny very deliberately; "an' by consikence the little fishes take hidin'. 'Tis a poor look-out for our callin'—a wisht poor job altogether! Fishers and apostles always stood in together, an' War's the ruination o' both. What with the Gospel gone scat, an' no dividends this side o' Christmas——"

"I asked you," interrupted Mr. Pamphlett, "what that firing means, out there? It's friendly, of course? A British battleship?"

"As to that," replied Un' Benny, slowly ruminating, "I wouldn' call it *friendly* in any man to let off a big-inch gun at anything. That's not the word I'd choose. And I don't grant 'ee that there's no danger because we men, as you call us"—Un' Benny distributed the emphasis delicately—"happen to be takin' it cool. But if you ask my opinion, she's a first-class cruiser; an' you hit it off when you asked, 'What's this firin' about?' 'Firin' about,' that's *of* it, as I reckon; and aboard of her, belike, the boys that left us o' Sunday, takin' a little practice to get their hands in. But there! A guess is a guess; and if you're anxious about it, and 'll step into my boat, sir, we'll put out and make sure."

Mr. Pamphlett ignored this proposal. He turned on

the other men. "It's a fine day, anyhow," he said; "and the wind turning nor'-westerly. If sure she's only a cruiser at practice, why are you fellows loafing in harbour?"

"As for *that*"—Un' Benny intercepted the question blandly—"they can answer for theirselves, them that's under obligation to 'ee. But you started on *me*, an' so I'll be polite an' lead off. In th' first place, with all this tow-row, the fish be all gone to bottom; there's not one'll take hook by day nor net by night. An' next, with a parcel o' reservists pickin' up the gunnery they've forgot, for a week or so the firin' is apt to be flippant. Yes, Mr. Pamphlett, you can go back to your business an' feel all the easier in mind every time a bangin' great shell makes ye bob up an' down in your chair. 'Tis a fine thing to stand here an' feel we've a Navy protectin' us all; but don't send these poor fellows out to be protected *too near*." Un' Benny's eyes twinkled a moment. "It does 'em good, too, to take a rest now an' then, an' smoke a pipe, an' praise the Lord that made 'em Englishmen."

Mr. Pamphlett detested Un' Benny's conversation. It always struck him as significantly meaningless. Again he addressed himself to the other men.

"What Rowett says about the fish is true enough, I dare say. When they hear all this noise——"

But Un' Benny took him up, blandly as before. "There's a man, down to Mevagissey," he said, "that holds 'tis no question of hearin', or of what you and I do call hearin'. Accordin' to him the fish have a sixth sense, denied to ordinary Christians——"

"I don't want to hear what this or that fool says at Mevagissey——"

"He's a County Councillor," murmured Un' Benny. "But to be sure, it don't follow."

"What *I* say," pursued Mr. Pamphlett, shaking a forefinger at the group, "is that Rowett may be his own master, but the rest of you mustn't take it into your heads that because our country happens to be at war you've an excuse to be idle. 'Business as usual'—that's my motto: and I doubt if Rowett here will find you a better-paying one, however long you listen to him." On secure ground now, Mr. Pamphlett faced about, challenging the old man.

"Heigh?" said Un' Benny with a well-affected start of surprise. "There now!—and I was allowin' you'd had enough o' my chatter. 'Business as usual'"—he looked closely at Mr. Pamphlett, and so let his gaze travel down the street, till it rested meditatively on the Bank doorway. "'Business as usual' . . . aye to be sure! Well, well!"

There was nothing in this upon which Mr. Pamphlett could retort. So, after wagging his forefinger again at the group of men, he turned and left them.

On his way back he came face to face with Nicky-Nan, still solitary and seated on his bollard; and pulled up before him.

"Oh, by the way, Nanjivell!—I hope you understand that the ejectment order still holds, and that I can take possession of the premises at any time?"

"That's as may be," answered Nicky-Nan slowly. "You tell me so, and I hear you."

"I tell you so, and it's the law. . . . But I've no wish to be hard, even after the trouble you've given me; and moreover this War may—er—tend to interpose some delay in one or two small matters I was

—er—projecting. 'Business as usual' is, and has been —as I have just been telling those fellows yonder—my motto since the early days of the crisis"—Mr. Pamphlett could not accurately remember when he had first come upon that headline in his newspaper—"'Business as usual,' but with—er—modifications, of course. As I remember, I told you yesterday that, if you behave yourself, I may relent so far as to give you a short grace."

"Thank 'ee," said Nicky Nan. "I'm behavin' myself—that's to say, so far as I know."

"But I want to make one or two points very clear to you. In the first place, what I'm about to say is strictly without prejudice?" Mr. Pamphlett paused, upon a note of interrogation.

"I don't rightly know what that means. But no matter: since you're sayin' it and I'm not."

"Secondly, if I give you yet a few weeks' grace, it is on condition that you bring me your rent regularly from this time forward."

"Go on."

"Thirdly, you are to understand plainly that, as I have the power and the right, so I shall use my own convenience, in ordering you to quit. Happen this War will last a long time."

"Then 'tis an ill wind that blows good to nobody."

"Happen it may be a short one. Or again, even if it lasts, I may change my mind and decide to start work on the premises at once. There may be a depression in the building trade, for example, and even putting in hand a small job like that would help to restore public confidence."

"You may give any dam reason you please to your-

self," said Nicky-Nan uncompromisingly, "so long as you don't start palmin' it 'pon me. I paid Hendy the costs o' the order this mornin — which is not to say that I promise 'ee to act on it. Whatever your reason may be, the point is you don't propose turnin' me out till further notice—hey?"

"Provided your rent is duly paid up to date."

"Right." Nicky-Nan slid a hand into his trouser-pocket, where his fingers met the reassuring touch of half a dozen sovereigns he carried there for earnest of his good fortune.

"And on the understanding that I claim possession whenever it suits me. When I say 'the understanding,' of course, there's no bargain implied. I am in a position to do as I like at any time. I want to make that clear."

"Very thoughtful of you."

"Well, I'm glad you're grateful."

"Who said so?"

"At least," answered Mr. Pamphlett with rising choler, "you must own that I have shown you great consideration—great consideration *and* forbearance." He checked his wrath, being a man who had severely trained himself to keep his temper in any discussion touching business. To the observance of this simple rule, indeed, he owed half his success in life. [During the operation of getting the better of a fellow-man, it was wellnigh impossible to ruffle Mr. Pamphlett.] "I'll leave you to think it over."

"Thank 'ee," said Nicky-Nan as the banker walked away; and sat on in the August sunshine, the portable gold of which harmonised with the tangible gold in his pockets, but so that he, being able to pay the piper, felt himself in command of the tune. He had ballasted

both pockets with coins. It gave him a wonderful sense of stability, on the strength of which he had been able to talk with Mr. Pamphlett as one man should with another. And lo! he had prevailed. Obedient to some subtle sense, Pamphlett had lowered his usual domineering tone, and was climbing down under the bluff he yet maintained. . . . Nicky-Nan was not grateful: but already he felt inclined to make allowance for the fellow. What a mastery money gave!

A voice hailed him from the doorway of the "Three Pilchards."

"Mornin', Nicky!"

Nicky-Nan slewed himself about on the bollard, and encountered the genial gaze of Mr. Latter, the landlord. Mr. Latter, a retired Petty Officer of the Navy, stood six feet two inches in his socks, and carried a stomach which incommoded even that unusual stature. The entrance-door of the "Three Pilchards" being constructed in two flaps, Mr. Latter habitually closed the lower one and eased the upper part of his façade upon it while he surveyed the world.

"Mornin', Nicky!" repeated Mr. Latter. "I han't seen ye this couple o' days; but I had word you weren't gone with the rest, your leg bein' so bad. Step indoors, an' rest it over a drink."

"You're very kind, Mr. Latter," Nicky-Nan answered somewhat stiffly. "I was just then thinkin' I'd come in and order one for the good o' the house." To himself he added: "One o' these days I'll teach that man to speak to me as 'Mr. Nanjivell'—though it come to remindin' him that his wife's mother was my father's wet-nurse, and glad of the job." But this he growled to himself as he hobbled up the steps to the door.

"I didn't say anything about payment," Mr. Latter remarked affably, stepping back a pace as he pulled open the flap of the door, and politely suppressing a groan at the removal of that abdominal support. "I was askin' you to oblige me by takin' a drink, seein' as how——"

"Seein' as how *what*?" Nicky-Nan asked with suppressed fierceness as he pushed his way in, conscious of the ballast in his pocket.

[Wonderful—let it be said again—is the confidence that money carries: subtle and potent the ways by which it asserts itself upon the minds of men!]

—"Seein' as how," Mr. Latter corrected himself, drawing back again and giving such room in the passage as his waist allowed—"seein' as how all true patriots should have a fellow-feelin' in times like the present, an' stand shoulder to shoulder, so to speak, not refusin' a drink when offered in a friendly way. It gives a feelin' of solidarity, as one might say. That's the word —solidarity. Still, if you insist," he paused, following Nicky-Nan into the little bar-parlour, "I mustn't say no. The law don't allow me. A two of beer, if I may suggest?"

"Brandy for me!" said Nicky-Nan recklessly. "And a soda."

"Brandy for heroes, as the sayin' is. Which, if Three Star, is sixpence, an' two is a shilling, and a split soda makes one-an'-four. 'Tis a grand beverage, but terrible costly." Mr. Latter took down the bottle from its shelf and uncorked it, still with an incredulous eye on Nicky-Nan. "What with the War breakin' out an' takin' away the visitors, an' money certain (as they tell me) to be scarce all over the land, I didn' reckon to sell another glass between this an' Christmas;

when in walks you, large as my lord, and calls for a brace! . . . Sure ye mean it?"

"I never insisted 'pon *your* choosin' brandy," said Nicky-Nan, beginning to fumble in his left trouser-pocket. "You can make it beer if you wish, but *I* said 'brandy.' If you have no——" He ended on a sharp outcry, as of physical pain.

For a dire accident had happened. The men of Polpier (as this narrative may or may not have mentioned)—that is to say, all who are connected with the fishery—in obedience to a customary law, unwritten but stringent, clothe the upper part of their persons in blue guernsey smocks. These being pocketless, all personal cargo has to be stowed somewhere below the belt. [In Mrs. Pengelly's shop you may purchase trousers that have as many as four pockets. They cost anything from eleven-and-sixpence to fifteen shillings, and you ask Mrs. Pengelly for them under the categorical name of "non-plush unmentionables"—"non-plush" being short for *ne plus ultra*.]

Nicky-Nan, then, plunging a hand into his left trouser-pocket in search of a florin which he believed to lie there amidst the costlier cargo, and confident that by its size and his sense of touch he could separate it from the gold, found that he must first remove his pocket-handkerchief. As he drew it forth, alas! two golden sovereigns followed in its fold, fell, and jingled on the slate-paved floor. Not all the fresh sawdust strewn there could deaden the merry sound of wealth. The two coins ran trickling, the one to clash against a brass spittoon, the other to take hiding in a dark corner under the counter.

"You might," said Mr. Latter that evening, relating

the occurrence to a circle of steady customers, "have knocked me down with a feather. To see old Nicky, of all men, standin' there before my very eyes an' sheddin' gold like a cornopean!"

What Mr. Latter did at the moment, or as soon as he recovered his presence of mind, was to set down his bottle and dive under the counter; while Nicky-Nan chased the coin which had ricocheted off the spittoon and lodged against the wainscot. Their physical infirmities made the pursuit painful for both, as the darkness in a small room overcrowded with furniture made it difficult. Mr. Latter emerged panting, in audible bodily distress. His search had been longer than Nicky-Nan's, but it was successful. He straightened himself up and held out the coin to the light.

"A sovereign! . . . I'll have to go out an' fetch change. A sovereign, send I may never!" He rang it on the bar-counter. "I'll step along an' get change from the Bank."

"There's no hurry," stammered Nicky-Nan hastily and in confusion. "Let's have the drink, an' maybe I can fish out something smaller. . . . You keep your parlour very dark," he added, repocketing both coins.

"I reckon now," observed Mr. Latter thoughtfully as he measured out the two tots of brandy, "that 'taty-patch o' your'n has been a perfect gold-mine this season. Everyone tells me how agriculture is lookin' up."

Nicky-Nan sought refuge in a falsehood.

"'Tis my rent," said he, "that I've been savin' up for Pamphlett. Didn' you see him stop an' speak wi' me five minutes since? Well, that was to make an appointment an' give me the receipt. Between you an' me, I've been gettin' a bit to leeward with it lately."

"Ay," said Mr. Latter, opening the soda-water and pouring it. "Everybody in the parish knows *that*. . . . Well, things are lookin' up, seemingly, and I congratulate 'ee. Here's Success to Agriculture! . . . Brandy for heroes! 'Tis a curious thing, how this partic'lar drink goes straight to the heart an' kindles it. Champagne has the same effect, only more so. A glass o' champagne will keep kickin' inside o' ye for an hour maybe. With brandy 'tis soon over and you want another go. I've noticed that often."

"You won't have a chance to notice it to-day." Nicky-Nan drained his glass at a gulp, and searched again in his pockets. . . .

"And if you'll believe me," reported Mr. Latter to a wondering audience that evening, "the man pulled out of his pocket—his *right* pocket, this time—a two-shillin' piece and a penny; and as he picks out the two-shillin' piece, to pay me, what happens but he lets drop another sovereign, that had caught between the two! It pitched under the flap o' the counter an' rolled right to my boot! 'What did I say to 'en?' Well, I don't mind ownin' that for a moment it took me full aback an' tied the string o' my tongue. But as I picked it up and handed it to 'en, I says, says I, 'Mr. Nanjivell,' I says, 'at this rate I don't wonder your not joinin'-up wi' the Reserve.' . . . What's more, naybours, I don't mind admittin' to you that after the man had paid an' left, I slipped to the door an' keeked out after him—an' that story of his about it bein' his rent-money was all a flam. He went past Pamphlett's Bank, never so much as turnin' to look at it."

CHAPTER XII

FIRST ATTEMPT AT HIDING

NICKY-NAN belonged, congenitally and unconsciously, to that happy brotherhood of men—*felices sua si bona norint*—whom a little liquor exhilarates, but even a great deal has no power to bemuse. Yet what avails an immunity above your fellows, if life seldom or never gives you opportunity to prove it?

Nicky-Nan had drunk, after long abstinence and upon a fasting stomach, one brandy-and-soda. He was sober as a judge; he walked straight and—bating his weak leg—firmly, yet he trod on air: he looked neither to the right nor to the left, yet he saw nothing of the familiar street through which he steered. For a vision danced ahead of him. Gold in his pockets, golden sunshine now in his veins—thanks to the brandy-and-soda,—a golden vision weaving itself and flickering in the golden August weather, and in his ears a sentence running, chiming, striking upon the word "gold"—"Ding-a-ding-a-dong! 'Taty-patch a *gold*-mine—'taty-patch a *gold*-mine!" The prosaic Mr. Latter had set the chime ringing, as a dull sacristan might unloose the music of a belfry; but like a chime of faëry it rippled and trilled, closing ever upon the deep note "gold," and echoed back as from a veritable gong of that metal.

"'Taty-patch a gold-mine"—How came it that, until Latter put the idea into his head, he had never

thought of this, his one firm holding on earth, as a hiding-place for his treasure? His lodging in the old house, hard as he would fight for it, acknowledged another man's will. But the patch of ground by the cliff was his own. He had claimed its virginity, chosen and tamed it, marked it off, fenced it about, broken the soil, trenched it, wrought it, taught the barren to bear. It lay remote, approachable only by a narrow cliff-track, overlooked by no human dwelling, doubly concealed—by a small twist of the coast-line and a dip of the ground—from the telescopes of the coastguard in their watch-house. Folks had hinted from time to time (but always chaffing him) that the land must belong to *someone*—to the Crown, maybe, or, more likely, to the Duchy. But he had tilled it for years undisturbed and unchallenged. The parcel had come to be known as "Nicky-Nan's Chapel," because on fine Sundays, when godlier folks were in church, he spent so much of his time there, smoking and watching the Channel and thinking his thoughts. It was inconceivable that anyone should dispute his title now, after the hundreds and hundreds of maundfuls of seaweed under which, first and last—in his later years—he had staggered up the path from the Cove, to incorporate them in the soil.

At the turn of the street he fetched up standing, arrested by another bright idea. Why, of course! He would carry up a part of his wealth to the 'taty-patch and bury it. . . . But a man shouldn't put all his eggs in one basket, and—*why* hadn't he thought of it before? The money had lain those many years, safe and unsuspected, under the false floor of the cupboard. Simplest thing in the world, now that Pamphlett had

given him a respite, to plank up the place again with a couple of new boards, plaster up the ceiling of the sitting-room, and restore a good part of the gold to its hiding!—not all of it, though; since Pamphlett might change his mind at any time, and of a sudden. No, a good part of the gold must be conveyed to the 'taty-patch. He would make a start, maybe, that very night—or rather, that very evening in the dusk when the moon rose: for (now he came to remember) the moon would be at her full to-morrow, or next day. While the dusk lasted he could dig, up there, and no passer-by would suspect him of any intent beyond eking out the last glimpse of day. To be surprised in the act of digging by moonlight was another matter, and might start an evil rumour. For one thing, it was held uncanny, in Polpier, to turn the soil by moonlight—a deed never done save by witches or persons in league with Satan. Albeit they may not own to it, two-thirds of the inhabitants of Polpier believe in black magic.

He would make a start, then, towards dusk. There was no occasion to take any great load at one time, or even to be seen with any conspicuous burden. As much gold as his two pockets would carry—that would serve for a start. To-morrow he might venture to visit Mrs. Pengelly and purchase a new and more capacious pair of trousers—to-morrow, or perhaps the day after. Caution was necessary. He had already astonished Mr. Gedye, the ironmonger, with his affluence: and just now again, like a fool, he had been dropping sovereigns about Latter's bar-parlour. That had been an awkward moment. He had extricated himself with no little skill, but it was a warning to be careful against multiplying evidence or letting it multiply. A new pair of

trousers, as this narrative has already hinted, is always a somewhat dazzling adventure in Polpier. No. . . . decidedly he had better postpone *that* investment. Just now he would step around to Boatbuilder Jago's and borrow or purchase a short length of eight-inch planking to repair the flooring of the bedroom cupboard. Jago had a plenty of such odd lengths to be had for the asking. "I'll make out the top of the water-butt wants mending," said Nicky-Nan to himself. "Lord! what foolishness folk talk about the contrivances of poverty. Here have I been living in fear and tremblement over a dozen things never likely to befall, and all because my brain has been starving for years, along with my stomach. Start the pump with a dose of brandy, and it rewards ye by working sweet and suent. Here at this moment be a dozen things possible and easy, that two hours agone were worrying me to the grave. Now I know how rich men thrive, and I'll use the secret. Simplicity itself it is: for set me on the Lord Mayor's throne and fill me with expensive meat and drink, and I'll be bold to command the Powers o' Darkness."

This was fine talking. But he had not freed himself from the tremors of wealth: and now again—

> Can such things be,
> And overcome us like a summer cloud,
> Without our special wonder?

—now and again and for about the twentieth time—now again, as he turned to bend his steps towards Boatbuilder Jago's yard—suddenly and without warning, as a wave the terror took him that in his absence some thief or spy had surprised his hoard. Under its

urgency he wheeled right-about and hurried for home, to assure himself that all was safe.

Such was his haste that in passing the corner of the bridge he scarcely observed a knot of children gathered thereby, until 'Beida's voice hailed him and brought him to a halt.

"Mr. Nanjivell!"

"Hey! Is that you, Missy?" Nicky-Nan wheeled half-about.

"If you had eyes in your head, you wouldn' be starin' at me," said 'Beida, "but at 'Bert. Look at him—And you, 'Biades, can stand there an' look up at him so long as you like, provided you don't bust out cryin' at his altered appearance: no, nor crick your neck in doin' it, but bear in mind that mother used up the last of the arnica when you did it last time tryin' to count the buttons up Policeman Rat-it-all's uniform, an' that if the wind should shift of a sudden and catch you with your eyes bulgin' out of your head like they'm doin' at this moment, happen 'twill fix you up comical for life; an' then instead of your growin' up apprenticed to a butcher, as has been your constant dream, we'll have to put you into a travellin' show for a gogglin' May-game, an' that's where your heart will be turnin' ever, far from the Old Folks at Home. . . . You'll excuse me, Mr. Nanjivell, but the time an' trouble it costs to wean that child's eyes off anything in the shape of a novelty you'd hardly believe. . . . Well, what do you say to 'Bert?"

"I'd say," answered Nicky-Nan slowly, contemplating the boy—who wore a slouch hat, a brown shirt with a loosely tied neckerchief, dark-blue cut-shorts and stockings that exhibited some three inches of bare

knee—"I'd say, if he came on me sudden, that he was Buffalo Bill or else Baden-Powell, or else the pair rolled into one."

"You wouldn't be far wrong either. He's a Boy Scout, that's what he is. Walked over to St. Martin's this mornin' an' joined up. A kind lady over there was so took with his appearance that she had to improve it or die on the spot, out of her own pocket. He's walked back with his own trousers in a parcel, lookin' —well, like what you see. *I* think it becomin', on the whole. He tells me his motto is 'Be British,' an' he has to do a kind action every day of his life: which he won't find easy, in a little place like Polpier."

As 'Beida drew breath, the boy faced Nicky-Nan half sulkily.

"They put me into this outfit. I didn't *ask* for it."

"If you want my opinion, 'Bert," said Nicky-Nan, "it suits 'ee very well; an' you look two inches taller in it already."

He hurried on in the direction of Boatbuilder Jago's yard, which stands close above the foreshore, on the eastern side of the little haven. When he returned, with the boards under his arm, it was to find 'Bert the centre of a knot of boys, all envious—though two or three were making brave attempts to hide it under a fire of jocose criticism. It was plain, however, that morally 'Bert held the upper hand. Whilst they had been playing silly games around the Quay, he had walked to St. Martin's and done the real thing. No amount of chaff could hide that his had been the glory of the initiative. Indeed, he showed less of annoyance with his critics than of boredom with 'Biades, who, which-

ever way his big brother turned, revolved punctually as a satellite, never relaxing his rapt, upward gaze of idolatry.

"You can shut your heads, the whole lot," said 'Bert airily. "First thing to-morrow mornin' the half of 'ee'll be startin' over for St. Martin's to enlist; an' you know it. Better fit you went off home and asked your dear mammies to put 'ee to bed early. Because there's not only the walk to St. Martin's an' back—which is six mile—but when you've passed the doctor for bandy legs or weak eyesight, you may be started on duty that very night. I ben't allowed to say more just now," he added with a fine air of official reticence. "And as for *you*"—he turned impatiently on 'Biades—"I wish you'd find your sister, to fetch an' shut 'ee away somewhere. Where's 'Beida *to*?"

"She's breakin' the news to mother," answered 'Biades.

By seven o'clock Nicky-Nan had measured and cut his boards to size. He fitted them loosely to floor the bedroom cupboard. Later on he would fix them securely in place with screws. But by this time daylight was dusking in, and more urgent business called him.

Returning to the parlour downstairs, he refilled his pockets with the gold of which he had lightened himself for his carpentry, knotted another twenty sovereigns tightly in his handkerchief, picked up the lighter of his two spades—for some months he had eschewed the heavier—and took his way through the streets, up the cliff-track by the warren, and so past the coastguard watch-house.

The sun had dropped behind the hill, leaving the West one haze of gold: but southward and seaward this gold grew fainter and fainter, paling into an afterglow of the most delicate blue amber. In the scarce-canny light, as he rounded the corner of the cliff, he perceived two small figures standing above the hollow which ran down funnel-wise containing his patch, and recognised them.

"Drat them children!" he muttered; but kept on his way, and, drawing near, demanded to know what business brought them so far from home at such an hour.

"I might ask you the same question," retorted 'Beida. "Funny time,—isn't it?—to start diggin' potatoes? An' before now I've always notice you use a visgy for the job. Yet you can't be *plantin'*—not at this season——"

"I find the light spade handier to carry," explained Nicky-Nan in some haste. "But you haven't answered my question."

"Well, if you *must* know, I'm kissin' good-night to 'Bert here. They've started him upon coast-watchin', and he's given this beat till ten-thirty, from the watch-house half-way to the Cove. I shouldn' wonder if he broke his neck."

"No fear," put in 'Bert, proudly exhibiting and flashing a cheap electric torch. "They gave me this at St. Martin's—and in less than an hour the moon'll be up."

"But the paper says there be so many spies about—eh, Mr. Nanjivell?"

"Damme," groaned Nicky-Nan, "I should think there were! Well, if there's military work afoot, at

this rate, I'd better clear.—Unless 'Bert would like me to stay here an' chat with 'en for company."

"We ben't allowed to talk—not when on duty," declared young 'Bert stoutly.

"Then kiss your brother, Missy, an' we'll trundle 'ways home."

CHAPTER XIII

FIRST AID

"I HOPE, Mary-Martha," said Miss Oliver, pausing half-way up the hill and panting, "that, whatever happens, you will take a proper stand."

"You are short of breath. You should take more exercise." Mrs. Polsue eyed her severely. "When an unmarried woman gets to your time of life, she's apt to think that everything can be got over with Fruit Salts and an occasional dose of Somebody's Emulsion. Whereas it can't. I take a mile walk up the valley and back every day of my life."

"I don't believe you could perspire if you tried, Mary-Martha."

"Well, and *you* needn't make a merit of it, . . . and if you ask *me*," pursued Mrs. Polsue, "one half of your palpitation is put on. You're nervous what show you'll make in the drawing-room, and that's why you're dilly-dallin' with your questions and stoppages."

"Mrs. Steele and me not being on visiting terms ——" Miss Oliver started to explain pathetically. "Yes, I know it was my *duty* to call when they first came: but what with one thing and another, and not knowing how she might take it—— Of course, Mary-Martha, if you insist on walking ahead like a band-major, I can't prevent it. But it only shows a ruck in your left stocking."

Mrs. Polsue turned about in the road. "You were

hoping, you said, that I'd be taking a proper stand? If that woman comes any airs over me——"

She walked on without finishing the sentence. "She's every bit as much afraid as I am," said Miss Oliver to herself, as she panted to catch up; "the difference being that I want to put it off and she's dying to get it over." Aloud she remarked, "Well, and that's all I was saying. As like as not they'll be trying to come it over us; and if we leave it to Hambly——"

"*Him?*" Mrs. Polsue sniffed. "You leave it to me!"

The Vicar welcomed them in the porch, and his pleasantly courteous smile, which took their friendliness for granted, disarmed Mrs. Polsue for a moment. "It took the starch out of you straight: I couldn't help noticin'," was Miss Oliver's comment, later in the day. "It took me by surprise," Mrs. Polsue corrected her: "—a man has no business to stand grimacing in his own doorway like a—a——" "Butler," suggested Miss Oliver. "—like a figure in a weather-house. What do *you* know about butlers? . . . but"—after a pause —"I dare say you're right, there. I've heard it put about that her father used to keep one; and quite likely, now you mention it, she stuck her husband in the doorway to hide the come-down." "The pot-plants were lovely," Miss Oliver sighed; "they made me feel for the moment like Eve in the Garden of Eden." "Then I'm thankful you didn't behave like it. *I* was stiff enough by time we reached the drawing-room."

"Stiff" indeed but faintly describes Mrs. Polsue's demeanour in the drawing-room; where, within a few minutes, were gathered Mrs. Pamphlett, Mr. Hambly,

Dr. Mant (who had obligingly motored over from St. Martin's) five or six farm wives, with a husband or two (notably Farmer Best of Tresunger, an immense man who, apparently mistaking the occasion for a wedding, had indued a pair of white cotton gloves, which he declined to remove, ignoring his wife's nudges). Four or five timid "women-workers," with our two ladies and the host and hostess, completed the gathering.

Mrs. Steele opened the business amid an oppressive silence, against which all the Vicar's easy chat had contended in vain.

"I hope," she began nervously, "that at such a time none of you will object to my using the word I want to use, and calling you 'friends'? . . . My friends, then—It was at my husband's suggestion that I invited you to meet this afternoon—because, you know, *somebody* must make a beginning."

"Hear, hear," put in Dr. Mant encouragingly.

Mrs. Steele's voice grew a little firmer. "We thought, too, that the Vicarage might be the most convenient place on the whole. It is a sharp walk up the hill for those of you who live in Polpier itself: but our stables being empty, the farmers, who come from farther and just now at greater sacrifice, escape a jolting drive down into the village and back."

"Hear, hear," repeated Dr. Mant. He was thinking of the tyres of his car. But this time he overdid it, and fetched up Mrs. Polsue as by a galvanic shock.

"If interruptions are to be the order of the day," said Mrs. Polsue, "I'd like to enter my protest at once. I don't hold, for my part, with calling public meetings —for I suppose this *is* a public meeting?" she asked, breaking off, with a challenging eye on the Vicar.

"By no means," he answered with quick good-humour. "It's a meeting by invitation, though—as my wife was about to explain—the invitations were meant to include *friends* of all creeds and parties."

"It's for a public purpose, anyhow?"

"Certainly."

"Then I may be saying what doesn't meet with your approval, or Mrs. Steele's, or the company's: but that's just my point. I don't hold with meetings for public business being called in a private house. Because if things are done that you don't approve of, either you sit mum-chance out o' politeness, or else you speak your mind and offend your host and hostess."

Mr. Hambly was about to interpose, but the Vicar checked him with a quick movement of his hand.

"Mrs. Polsue's is a real point; and, if she will allow me to say so, she has put it very well. Indeed, I was going to propose, later on, that we hold our future meetings in a place to be agreed on. This is just a preliminary talk; and when a dozen people meet to discuss, it's handier as a rule to have someone in the chair. . . . You agree? . . . Then for form's sake, I propose that we elect a chairman."

"And I propose Mrs. Steele," added Mr. Hambly.

"Seconded," said Farmer Best, "Damn it!"

"William!" his spouse ejaculated. (She knew that he detested Mrs. Polsue, whom he had once described in private as "the p'isenest 'ooman that ever licked verdigris off a farthing.")

"'Tis all right, Chrisjana," he responded in a muffled voice, with head abased as nearly between his calves as a protuberant stomach allowed. "But one o' the castors o' this here chair has given way. . . .

Beggin' your pardon, ma'am,"—he raised a face half-apoplectic but cheerful, and turned it upon his hostess —"but I totalled up seventeen score when last weighed. There's no damage done that can't be set right with a screw-driver afore I go." Then, with another turn-about that embraced the company, "Proposed an' seconded that Mrs. Steele do take the chair. Those in favour say 'Hi!'—the contrary 'No.' . . . The Hi's 'ave it." (Farmer Best was Vice-Chairman of the Board of Guardians, and knew how to conduct public business.)

Mrs. Steele resumed her little speech. A pink spot showed upon either cheek, but she spoke bravely.

"I suppose the first thing to be done is to see, as tactfully as we can, that during these first few weeks at any rate the wives and families of the men who have gone away to fight for us suffer no want. There are other ways in which we can be useful. And I take it for granted that all of us women, who cannot fight, are longing to be useful in some way or other. . . . There is the working of socks, scarves, waistcoats, for instance; the tearing and rolling of bandages; and Dr. Mant, who has so kindly driven over from St. Martin's, tells me that he is ready to be kinder still and teach an Ambulance Class. . . . But our first business—as he and Mr. Hambly agree—is to make sure that the wives and children of our reservists want neither food nor money to pay their rent. . . . They tell me that in a few weeks the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association will be ready to take much of this work off our hands, though acting through local distributors. Indeed, the Vicar—indeed, my husband has already received a letter from the District Secretary of the Association

asking him to undertake this work. In time, too, no doubt—as Government makes better provision—that work will grow less and less. But we have not even arrived at it yet. Until it is set going these poor women and children may be short of money or the food that money buys. So the proposal is to raise a few pounds, form a War Emergency Committee, and tide matters over until a higher authority supersedes us. For in the interval a neighbour may be starving because her husband has gone off to fight for his country. None of us, surely, could bear the thought of that?"

Mrs. Steele's voice had gathered confidence, with something of real emotion, as it went on; and an approving murmur acknowledged her little speech. Her husband, whose eyes had kindled towards the close, was in the act of throwing her an applausive glance when Mrs. Polsue's voice cut the silence sharply.

"I don't understand this talk about a Soldiers' and Sailors' Association, or whatever you call it. Are we a part of it, here in this room?"

"Oh, no," the Vicar answered. "We are here merely to discuss forming an Emergency Committee, to provide (among other things) present relief until the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association—dreadful name!—until the S.S.F.A., as we'll call it, is ready to take over the work."

"And then we shall be cold-shouldered out, I suppose?"

"Dang it, ma'am!" put in Farmer Best. "What matter who does the work, so long as the poor critters be fed meantime?"

[Here we should observe that while Mrs. Polsue had a trick of sniffing that suggested a chronic cold in the

head, Farmer Best suffered from an equally chronic obstruction of the respiratory organs, or (as he preferred to call them) his pipes. As from time to time he essayed to clear one or another of these, the resultant noise, always explosive, resembled the snort of a bullock or the *klock!* of a strangulated suction-pump. With these interjections Mrs. Polsue on the one hand, Farmer Best on the other, punctuated the following dialogue. And this embarrassed the company, which, obliged in politeness to attribute them to purely physical causes, could not but own inwardly that they *might* be mistaken for the comments—and highly expressive ones—of mutual disapprobation.]

"Danging it don't answer my question—nor banging it," persisted Mrs. Polsue. "I want to know more about this Association, and where *we* come in. . . . Just now, Mrs. Steele was talking about a District Secretary, and local distributors—which looks to me as if the whole business was cut-and-dried."

"There's nothing cut-an'-dried about *me*, ma'am," Farmer Best's sharp little eyes twinkled, and he chuckled obesely.

"Again Mrs. Polsue has the right of it," answered the Vicar. "Perhaps I should have explained at the beginning that this War, coming upon us so suddenly, has taken the S.S.F.A. somewhat at unawares, in Cornwall at any rate. The machinery exists—in skeleton; but there still wants the *personnel* to work it. In our District, for instance——"

"District?" snapped Mrs. Polsue. "What's a District?"

The Vicar pulled a wry face. "The Districts at present correspond with the Deaneries in the diocese."

"O-oh, indeed? Ha!"

"There is worse to come, Mrs. Polsue." He laughed frankly. "You asked, 'Who are the local distributors?' A present rule of the Association—which I beg you to believe that I regret—provides for two agents in each parish, to report and advise on cases; the Parson, and one of the Guardians."

"—And that's me, ma'am. *Honk!*" added Farmer Best. "I'm what Parson called the skelliton of the machinery." He wound up with a wink at the company, and a wheezy laugh.

"You may titter, all of you!" Mrs. Polsue glared about her. "But if ever there was hole-and-corner sectarianism in this world—And *this* is what we've come to listen to!"

"You han't done much listenin' up to now, ma'am."

"Forgive me," Mrs. Steele interposed, as Dr. Mant looked at his watch. "I don't know much about rules of the chair; but I really think you are all out of order. We are not yet discussing the Association or its rules, but whether or not we shall form a Committee to look after these poor people until something better is done for them. We in this room, at all events, belong to very different denominations. I—I hope we meet only as Christians."

Farmer Best slapped his thigh. "Bray-vo, ma'am! and you never spoke a truer word."

"I only wish to add," the Vicar persisted, "that before any outside society works in this parish, I shall urge very strongly that the parish nominates its agents: and that I hope to have the pleasure of proposing Mrs. Polsue and Mr. Hambly. One more word——"

"Certainly not." His wife cut him short with a sharp rap on the table. "I can rule *you* out of order, at all events!"

Everybody laughed. Even Mrs. Polsue was mollified. "Well, I managed to drag the truth out at last," was her final shot, as the meeting resolved itself into Committee and fell to business.

She was further placated, a few minutes later, by being elected (on the Vicar's proposition) a member of the House-to-house Visiting Sub-Committee. "'Twill give her," Farmer Best growled to his wife, later, as they jogged home in the gig, "the chance of her life to poke a nose into other folks' kitchens."

Farmer Best—it should here be observed—with all his oddities, was an exemplary Poor Law Guardian. He had small personal acquaintance with Polpier itself: the steepness of the coombs in which it lay was penible to a man of his weight: yet, albeit by hearsay, he knew the inner workings of the small town, being interested in the circumstances of all his neighbours, vividly charitable towards them, and at the same time no fool in judging. Of the country-folk within a circuit of twelve miles or more his knowledge was something dæmonic. He could recount their pedigrees, intermarriages, numbers in family; he understood their straits, their degrees of affluence; he could not look across a gate at a crop, or view the state of a thatch, but his mind worked sympathetically with some neighbour's economies. He gave away little in hard money; but his charities in time and personal service were endless. And the countryside respected him thoroughly: for he was eccentric in the fashion of a true Englishman, and,

with all his benevolence, you had to get up early to take him in.

Nor was Farmer Best the only one to doubt Mrs. Polsue's fitness for her place in the sub-committee. Mrs. Steele spoke to her husband very positively about it as he helped to water her begonia-beds in the cool of the evening.

"You were weak," she said, "to play up to that woman: when you know she is odious."

"The more reason," he answered. "If you're a Christian and find your neighbour odious, you conciliate him."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"My dear Agatha—isn't that a somewhat strong expression, for you?"

She set down her watering-pot.

"Do you know what I *want* to say?" she asked. "I *want* to say, 'Go to blazes!' . . . When I said the woman is odious, do you suppose I meant odious to me or to you?"

"O-oh!" The Vicar rubbed the back of his head penitently. "I am sorry, Agatha—I was thinking of the time she gave you this afternoon."

"She will give those poor women a worse time—a dreadful time!" said Mrs. Steele, with conviction.

He picked up his watering-pot in such a hurry as to spill a tenth or so of its contents into his shoes; swore under his breath; then laughed aloud.

"I'll bet any money they'll get upsides with her, all the same. Lord! there may be fun!"

His wife eyed him as he emptied the watering-pot spasmodically over the flowers.

"As a rule you have so much more imagination than

I. . . . Yet by fits and starts you take this business as if it were a joke. And it *is* War, you know."

The Vicar turned away hurriedly, to fetch more water.

On the Sub-Committee for House-to-house Visiting —the Relief Committee, as it came to be called—were elected:

(1) For Polpier—Mrs. Polsue, Miss Alma Trudgian (in Mrs. Polsue's words, "a pitiful Ritualist, but well-meaning. *She'll* give no trouble"), the Vicar, and Mr. Hambly.

(2) For the country side of the parish—Mr. and Mrs. Best, "with power to add to their number." On the passing of this addendum, Farmer Best uttered, apparently from the roof of his palate, a noise not unlike the throb of the organ under the dome of St. Paul's, and the mysterious words, "Catch me!"

Next was formed a Sub-Committee of Needle-Workers, to make hospital shirts, knit socks, etc. It included Miss Charity Oliver; and Mrs. Steele undertook to act as Secretary and send out the notices.

—Next, a Sub-Committee of Ways and Means, to collect subscriptions, and also to act as Finance Committee. The Vicar, Mr. Best, Mr. Hambly, with Mr. Pamphlett for Honorary Treasurer. Mrs. Pamphlett (a timid lady with an irregular catch of the breath), without pledging her husband, felt sure that under the circumstances he wouldn't mind. Then Dr. Mant unfolded a scheme of Ambulance Classes. He was one of those careless, indolent men who can spurt invaluably on any business which is not for their private advantage. (Everybody liked him; but he was known to neglect his own business deplorably.) He could

motor over to Polpier and lecture every Saturday evening, starting forthwith. Mrs. Steele undertook to write to the Local Education Authority for permission to use the Council Schoolroom.

At this point the parlour-maid brought in the tea.

. . . . . .

"I believe," remarked Miss Oliver pensively, on the return journey, "I could take quite a liking to that woman if I got to know her."

"She won't give you the chance, then," said Mrs. Polsue; "so you needn't fret."

"No, I suppose not . . . in a fashion. Still"—Miss Oliver brightened—"she proposed me on the Needlework Committee, and we're to meet at the Vicarage every Wednesday. She looked up at me a moment before mentioning my name, and smiled as nice as possible; you might almost say she read what was in my mind."

"'Twould account for her smiling, no doubt."

"I don't know what you mean by that. 'Twas in my mind that I'd rather be on that committee than on any other. She's a proper lady, whatever you may say, Mary-Martha. And the spoons were real silver—I took occasion to turn mine over, and there was the lion on the back of it, sure enough."

"I saw you in the very act, and meant to tell you of it later; but other things drove it out of my head. You should have more command over yourself, Charity Oliver."

"But I *can't*," Miss Oliver protested. "When I see pretty things like that, my fingers won't stop twiddlin' till I make sure."

"By the same argument I wonder you didn't pocket the spoon. Which was old Lord Something-or-Other's complaint; though I doubt you wouldn't get off so light as he did."

"There was the tea-pot, too. . . . I couldn't get nigh enough to see the mark on that, though I tried. Next time, perhaps—though I doubt she won't have the silver out for ordinary workin' parties——"

"Tut—the tea-pot was silver right enough. I ought to know, havin' one of my own and a heavier by ounces. No, I don't use it except on special occasions: because you can't make so good tea in silver as in china ware; and clome is better again. But though you lock it away, a silver tea-pot is a thing to be conscious of. I don't hold," Mrs. Polsue fell back on her favourite formula, "with folks puttin' all their best in the shop window."

"Well, you *must* be strong-minded! For my part," Miss Oliver confessed, "little luxuries always get the better o' me. I declare that if a rich man was to come along an' promise to load me with diamonds and silver tea-pots and little knick-knacks of that sort, I shouldn' care who he was, nor how ugly, but I'd just shut my eyes and fling myself at his head."

"You'd better advertise in the papers, then. It's time," said Mrs. Polsue sardonically. She wheeled about. "Charity Oliver, you needn't use no more silly speech to prove what I could see with my own eyes, back yonder, even if I hadn't known it already. You're a weak fool—that's what you are! Those folks, with their pretty manners and their 'how-dee-do's,' and 'I hope I see you well's,' and their talk about all classes bein' at one in these times of national

trial and standin' shoulder to shoulder till it makes a body sick—do you reckon they *mean* a word of it? Do you reckon that if 'twas Judgment Day itself, and you given to eatin' peas with a knife, they'd really want you to luncheon?"

"But I *don't.*"

"I'm puttin' it for the sake of argument——"

"Then I wish you wouldn't," Miss Oliver interrupted with some spirit.

"—And old Hambly kow-towing like a Puss-in-Boots till I could have wrung his neck for him—and you weakenin' and playin' gentility as you picked it up, like another cat after a mouse—and myself the only one left to show 'em plain that we weren't to be put upon—yes, and after you'd hoped, up to the very door, that whatever happened, I'd take a proper stand!"

"Well, and so I did," Miss Oliver admitted defiantly "But I didn't ask you to make yourself *conspicuous.*"

CHAPTER XIV

POLSUE *v.* PENHALIGON, NANJIVELL INTERVENING

At breakfast, two days later, Dr. Mant received a summons to visit Polpier and pronounce upon the symptoms of Boatbuilder Jago's five-year-old son Josey (Josiah), who had been feverish ever since Tuesday evening. The Doctor's practice ranged over a wide district, and as a rule (good easy man) he let the ailments of Polpier accumulate for a while before dealing with them. Then he would descend on the town and work through it from door to door—as Un' Benny Rowett put it, "like a cross between a ferret an' a Passover Angel." Thus the child and his temperature might have waited for thirty-six hours—the mothers of Polpier being skilled in febrifuges, from quinine to rum-and-honey, treacle posset, elder tea—to be dealt with as preliminaries to the ambulance lecture, had it not been that (1) the Doctor had recently replaced his old trap with a two-seater car, which lifted him above old economies of time, and (2) he wished to ascertain if the valley schoolhouse, in which he was to lecture, possessed a wall-chart or diagram of the human frame; for it is useful to start an ambulance class with some brief information on the body and its organs, their position and functions. Also he remembered casually an official letter received from Troy, a couple of days ago, concerning one Nicholas Nanjivell, a reservist. The man, if he remembered rightly, had an epithelioma

somewhere in his leg, and was quite unfit for service. Nevertheless he must be visited: for the letter was official.

First of all, then, the Doctor hied him to Boatbuilder Jago's: and it was lucky he did so, for the child had developed measles—a notifiable complaint. "Any other cases about?" he asked.

Mrs. Jago did not know of another child sick or sorry in the whole of Polpier. "Which," she went on to argue in an aggrieved tone, "it therefore passes my understandin' why our Josey should be took, poor mite! 'Tisn't as if he was a naughty child, either."

"Everything must have a beginning, Mrs. Jago," said the doctor in his cheerful matter-of-fact way.

"You reckon as it will spread, then?"

"I don't know. I hope not. . . . It's a mercy that the schools are closed for the holidays. When did they close, by the way?"

"Just a week ago."

"H'm. . . . I must step up and ask the Schoolmaster a few questions."

"I called you in to cure my Josey, not to talk about other folk's children." (Mrs. Jago was a resentful woman.)

"And I am doing my best for him. . . . Tut! in a week or so he'll be running about as well as ever. But I'm the Medical Officer of Health, ma'am."

"Well I know it; seein' that, four months back, as you happened to be passin', I called you in an' asked you to look at the poor dear's eyes an' give me a certificate that he was sufferin' from something chronic. An' you flatly declined."

"If my memory serves me, I said he had a small

stye in his eye, and I was willing to certify that for what it was worth, if you didn't mind paying me half a crown."

"If edication's free, as they call it, I don't see why a body should pay half a crown to get off what can be had for nothing. That's how I reasoned then, and always shall. In consikence o' which that la-di-da of an Attendance Officer, that thinks all the maids be after him an' looks sideways into every shop window he passes for a sight of his own image—and if it rids us of a fella like that, I'm all for Conscription—got me summonsed before the Tregarrick bench an' fined another half-crown, with five shillin' costs. An' now, when the mischief's done an' the tender dear one rash from head to foot"—Mrs. Jago mopped her eyes with the edge of her apron—"what better can 'ee say than thank God the schools be closed! For my part, I wish He'd close an' roll the great stone o' Daniel agenst 'em for ever and ever!"

Doctor Mant sought up the valley to the Schoolmaster, Mr. Rounsell, whose quarters formed a part of the school buildings, and ended the block on its southern or seaward side. One roof, indeed, covered him in and out of school: and the Vicar, as one of the Managers, had been heard to lament this convenient provision. "It never allows the fellow to forget his chain: he talks to me as if I were a class of forty."

Mr. Rounsell himself answered the door. He had been gardening, and was in his shirt-sleeves. At sight of his visitor he became exceedingly prim and scholastic, with a touch of defiance. He was short in stature, and, aware of this, often paused in the middle of a sentence to raise himself on his toes. He made a

special study of what he called "Voice-Production," and regulated his most ordinary conversation by the laws (as he understood them) of that agreeable science.

"Doctor Mant?"

"Ah, it's yourself, is it?" chimed Dr. Mant, whom the Schoolmaster's accent always sent back, and instantly, to a native brogue. "Well, and it's a fine row of sweet peas you have, Mr. Rounsell, at the edge of the garden by the stream. I note them every time I drive by: and how in the world you contrive it, year after year, in the same soil——"

"You take me at some disadvantage, sir," said Mr. Rounsell stiffly. "My daughter being from home on a holiday, and few people coming to this door at any time, unless it be to ask a small favour."

"Well, and you've hit it: for myself's one of that same," Dr. Mant assured him cheerily. "But business first! Jago's child has the measles. Had you any reason to suspect measles, or anything of the sort, in your school before you closed it a week ago?"

Mr. Rounsell, who had seemed to be arming himself against a very different approach, sensibly relaxed his guard. He was punctilious by habit in all official responsibilities. He considered for a moment before answering.

"Had I done so, I should have reported my—er—suspicions. I cannot tax my memory, Dr. Mant, with having observed a symptom in any child which pointed—er—in that direction. With regard to the child Jago, I was the less likely to be forewarned of such an—er—shall we say?—eventuality, seeing that he is the most irregular attendant of my infant class, and, so far as my recollection serves me, his attendances

during the past quarter amount to but twenty-three point four. I leave you to judge."

"What about his attendance the week before breaking up?"

"I can look up the Register if you wish, sir. But, speaking at off-hand, I should compute the child Josiah Jago's attendances during the last week of July at *nil*, or thereabouts. You will understand, Dr. Mant, that at the very close of the school year many parents take advantage, reasoning that they will not be prosecuted during the holidays. I may say that I have drawn the attention of the School Attendance Committee to this—er—propensity on the part of parents, and have asked them to grapple with it: but, so far, without result."

"Hallelujah!" exclaimed Dr. Mant. "Then there's hope we may isolate the little devil. . . . Well, so far so good. But that wasn't my only reason for calling. I have to give an ambulance lecture in your schoolroom to-morrow evening: and I came to ask if you had a wall-map or chart of the human body to help me along. Otherwise I shall have to lug over a lot of medical books with plates and pass 'em around: and the plates are mixed up with others. . . . Well, you understand, they're not everybody's picture-gallery. That's to say, you can't pass a lot of books around and say, 'Don't turn the page, or maybe you'll get more than you bargain for.'"

Mr. Rounsell had stiffened visibly. "I will not conceal from you, Dr. Mant, that the matter on which you now approach me is—er—the subject on which I —er—privately anticipated that you had called. I have no *official* knowledge of your lecturing here to-morrow

—instructive as I am sure it will be. The Managers have not consulted me; they have not even troubled to give me official notice. But come inside, sir."

Doctor Mant followed, to a little parlour lined with books; wherein the little man turned on him, white with rage.

"I have heard, by a side wind," he foamed, "that a meeting was held, two days ago, up at the Vicarage, when it was decided that you should hold lectures in this school—*my* school. I wasn't asked to attend. . . . And of course you will jump to the conclusion that I am over-sensitive, huffed for my own sake. It isn't that! . . . I *am* huffed—maddened if you will—for the sake of my calling. For twenty years, Dr. Mant, I have opened this school every morning with prayer, dismissed it with prayer every evening, and between times laboured to preach many things that all in the end come to one thing—the idea of a poor English schoolmaster. All over the country other poor schoolmasters have been spending their lives teaching in just the same way their notion of England—what she is, has been, ought to be. Similarly, no doubt, teachers all over France and Germany have been teaching—under the guise of grammar, arithmetic, what not—*their* ideas of what France or Germany has been, is, ought to be. These nations are opposed and at length they come to a direct conflict, in this War. Mark you what happens! At once we patient teachers in England are brushed all aside. You call a chance Committee of amateurs, and the man who has taught the boys whom, within a fortnight, you will be clamouring to fight for you, has not even the honour to be consulted. . . . Yes, I think well enough of Great Britain to be pretty confident

that she will win, letting us slip; that is, she will win though fighting with a hand tied. But Germany is no such fool. *She* won't, in her hour of need, despise the help of *her* teachers. *They* teach what is almost diametrically opposed to our teaching: they teach it thoroughly, and on my soul I believe it to be as nearly opposed as wrong can be to right. But they have the honour to be trusted; therefore they will succeed in making this war a long one. . . . Yes, I have a wall-map, sir, of the human body. It does not belong to the school: I bought it on my own account seven years ago, but the then Managers considered it too naked to hang on the walls of a mixed school, and disallowed the expense. You are very welcome to use it, and I am only glad that at length it will serve a purpose."

"Touchy lot, these school-teachers!" mused Dr. Mant on his way back to the town. "I never can like 'em, somehow. . . . Maybe I ought to have used a little tact and told him that, as I understood it, Mrs. Steele called the meeting; and it was for women-workers only. That wouldn't quite account for Farmer Best, though," he chuckled. "And I suppose Best and the Vicar, as Managers—yes, and Mrs. Pamphlett's another—just put their heads together on the spot and gave leave to use the schoolroom, without consulting the Head Teacher at all. I don't suppose it ever crossed their minds. . . . No: on the whole that poor little man is right. Nobody in England ever *does* take any truck in schoolmasters. They're just left out of account. And I dare say—yes: I dare say—that means we don't, as a people, take any real truck in Education. Well, and who's the worse for it?—barring the teachers

themselves, poor devils! Germany has taken the other line, put herself in the hands of pedagogues, from the Professors down: and a nice result it's going to be for her, and for the rest of the world in the meantime! On the whole——"

On the whole, the Doctor decided—faithful to his habit of looking questions in the face and so passing on—that these things worked out pretty well as they were.

His reflections carried him to the bridge-end, where, in the porch of the Old Doctor's house, he encountered Mrs. Polsue.

"Ah! Good morning, ma'am! We are bound for the same door, it appears? That's to say if, as I seem to remember, a man called Nanjivell lives here?"

"He does," Mrs. Polsue answered. "And if I may make bold to say so, it's high time!"

"Eh? . . . Are you looking after him? I'd no idea that he was really sick."

"No more haven't I," said Mrs. Polsue. "But I'll say 'tis time *somebody* looked after him, if I say no more. In point of fact," she added, "I'm not seeing Nicholas Nanjivell, but a woman called Penhaligon who lives in the other tenement here. Her husband was called up last Saturday."

"What, are you ladies at work already?"

"Oh, *I* don't let the grass grow under my feet," said Mrs. Polsue.

"Damn the woman, I suppose that's a slap at *me*," muttered Dr. Mant to himself. But he tapped on the Penhaligons' door for her very politely.

"Thank you," she said. "That's Nanjivell's door, at the end of the passage."

He bowed and went on, came to the door, paused for

a glance at the padlock hitched loose on the staple, knocked, and—as his custom was when visiting the poor—walked in briskly, scarce waiting for an answer.

"Hallo!"

Between him and the small window, almost blocking the light—on a platform constructed of three planks and a couple of chairs set face to face—stood Nicky-Nan, with a trowel in one hand and a bricklayer's board in the other, surprised in the act of plastering his parlour ceiling.

"Had an accident here?" asked Dr. Mant, eyeing the job critically. "Old house tumbling about your ears?"

"No . . . yes—that's to say——" stammered Nicky-Nan; then he seemed to swallow down something, and so to make way for a pent-up fury. "Who sent for 'ee? Who told 'ee to walk in like that without knockin'? . . . *That's* what I ask—Who sent for 'ee here? *I* didn'!"

"What in thunder's wrong with ye?" asked the Doctor, very coolly taking a third chair, seating himself astraddle on it, and crossing his arms over the top. "No harm to be taken patching up a bit of plaster, is there?" Again he eyed the ceiling.

"I—I beg your pardon, Doctor," answered Nicky-Nan, recollecting himself. "But I live pretty lonely here, and the children——"

"So *that's* why you put a padlock on the door? . . . Well, I'm not a child. And though you didn't send for me, somebody else did. Mr. Johns, the Custom House Officer at Troy. He wants to know why you didn't go with the rest of the Reserve last Sunday."

Nicky-Nan blazed up again. "Then you can tell 'en I can't nor I won't—not if he cuts me in little pieces,

I won't! Curse this War, an' Johns 'pon the top of it! Can't you *see*——"

"No," put in the Doctor, "that's just what I can't, while you stand up there spitting like a cat on the tiles between me and the light. What fly has stung ye I can't think; unless you want to get off by passing yourself on me for a lunatic; and I can't certify to that without calling in a magistrate. . . . Here, man, don't be a fool, but get down!"

Nicky-Nan laid aside trowel and board on the platform, and lowered himself to the floor, very painfully.

"Sit ye down here!" Doctor Mant jumped up and turned his chair about. "Wait a moment, though, and let me have a look at you. No! not that way, man—with your back to the light!" He caught Nicky-Nan by the two shoulders, faced him about to the window, and took stock of him. "H'm . . . you look pretty bad."

Nicky-Nan, in fact, had spent half the previous night in crawling upstairs and downstairs, between parlour and bedroom, or in kneeling by the bedroom cupboard, hiding his wealth. He had thrown himself at last on his bed, to sleep for a couple of hours, but at daybreak had turned out again to start upon the plastering and work at it doggedly, with no more sustenance than a dry biscuit. It had all been one long-drawn physical torture; and the grey plaster smeared on his face showed it ghastly even beyond nature.

"Here, sit down; strip your leg, and let me have a look at it."

The examination took some fifteen minutes, perhaps; the Doctor kneeling and inspecting the growth with the aid of a pocket magnifying-glass.

"Well," said he, rising and dusting his knees, "it's a daisy, and I'll bet it hurts. But I don't believe it's malignant, for all that. If you were a rich man, now —— but you're not; so we won't discuss it. What you'll have to do is to lie up, until I get you a ticket for the South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital."

"No hospital for me," said Nicky-Nan, setting his jaw.

"Don't be a fool. I let slip in my haste that I don't reckon the thing malignant; and I don't—as yet. But it easily may be; and anyhow you're going to have trouble with it."

"I've had trouble enough with it already. But, mortal or not, I ben't goin' to stir out o' Polpier nor out o' this house. . . . Doctor, don't you ask it!" he wound up, as with a cry extorted by pain.

"Why, man, what are you afraid of? An operation for *that*, what is it? A whiff of chloroform—and in a week or so——"

"But——," interrupted Nicky-Nan sharply, and again recollected himself. "To tell 'ee the truth, Doctor—that's to say, if what passes between patient an' doctor goes no farther——"

"That's all right. I'm secret as houses."

"To tell 'ee the truth, then, there's a particular reason why I don't want to leave Polpier—not just for the present."

Dr. Mant stared at him. "You are going to tell me that reason?"

But Nicky-Nan shook his head. "I'd rather not say," he confessed lamely.

Still Dr. Mant stared. "Look here, Nanjivell. You've a beast of a lump on your leg, and I can certify

at once that it unfits you for service. You couldn't even crawl up a ladder aboard ship, let alone work a gun. But the people over at Troy have asked the question; and, what is more, it sticks in my head that, two days ago, I got a letter about you—an anonymous letter, suggesting that you were just a malingerer, who nursed an ailment rather than go to the War and take your chance with the others. As a rule I put that kind of letter in the fire, and so I did with this one. As a rule, also, I put it right out of my head. . . . But I've a conscience, in these times; and if I thought you to be nursing a trouble which I pretty well know to be curable, just to avoid your honest share in this War——" Dr. Mant paused.

"Cuss the War!" said Nicky-Nan wearily. "It looks to me as if everybody was possessed with it."

Dr. Mant still gazed at him curiously, then whipped about with a sudden "Hey! What's *that*?"

That was the voice of Mrs. Penhaligon uplifted without, voluble and frenzied: and the Doctor hurried forth, Nicky-Nan hobbling after, to find Mrs. Penhaligon waving her arms like a windmill's, and Mrs. Polsue, as before the blast of them, flat-backed against the wall of the passage.

"—And there you'll stay," Mrs. Penhaligon threatened, "while I teach your proud flesh! S'pose now I ventured on *you*, as you've been venturin' on *me!* S'pose now that, without so much as a visitin' card, I nosed in on you with—'So that's your poor dear husban's portrait, that you nagged to his grave—and a speakin' image of him too, afore he took to the drink as the better way—— An' what little lux'ries

might *you* have cookin' in the apparatus, such as a barren woman might reas'nably afford Yes, yes—it must be a great savin', havin' no children of your own, but do it warrant pig's liver an' bacon of a Saturday?' Oh, my Gor, *I'll* make your two ends meet afore I've done with 'ee! *I'll* tell 'ee the savin' of lard 'pon butter! *I'll* tell 'ee about nettle-broth an' bread-crumbs for a child's diet! *I'll*——"

The noise had attracted a group of women to the porchway; among them, Mrs. Climoe—"good at the war-cry," as Homer says of Diomede. They huddled forward, obscuring the light.

Mrs. Polsue, feeling the wall firm against her back, collected her dignity. "I wish all *respectable* people here," she appealed to Dr. Mant, as he came hurrying up the passage, "to take note of this woman's language."

"'Woman'?" panted Mrs. Penhaligon. "No more of a woman than yourself: and less of a lady, thank God! Out! OUT! afore I soil my hands upon 'ee!"

"You would hardly believe, Dr. Mant"—Mrs. Polsue addressed him with an air of fine gentility, as the one person present who could understand—"but I called on this poor body to advise and, if necessary, procure her some addition to her income from the Emergency Fund."

"Oh, take her away!" sobbed Mrs. Penhaligon, suddenly breaking down. "Isn't it enough to lie awake at night with your man at the wars? You're a gentleman, sir, an' a doctor, an' can understand. Do 'ee take her away!"

But Nicky-Nan had pushed forward. "You mean well, ma'am, I don't doubt," he said, addressing Mrs.

Polsue. "But this here War has got upon everybody's nerves, in a manner o' speaking."

"It doesn't seem to trouble yours," retorted Mrs. Polsue, at bay and vicious; "or maybe it has, and that's why you're not with the Reserve."

Nicky-Nan flushed to the roots of his hair. But he answered pacifically—"Until I go, ma'am, you may take it from me that Mrs. Penhaligon shan't want. I fixed all that up with her husband afore he left. So there's not need for you callin' again, if you don't mind."

He said it firmly, yet quite respectfully. One or two of the women in the porch murmured approval.

Not so Mrs. Climoe.

"O—oh!" said Mrs. Climoe, half aloud and all unheeded for the moment. "So that's the way the wind blows, sure enough!"

CHAPTER XV

THE 'TATY-PATCH

NICKY-NAN went back to his parlour, closed the door carefully, mounted the platform again, and resumed his plastering. He felt vexed with himself over that little speech of bravado. It had been incautious, with all those women listening.

Still it might be explained away, and easily enough. That woman Polsue put everybody's back up. His words had been just a piece of bluff, to get rid of her.

He had succeeded, too. He chuckled, recalling Mrs. Polsue's discomfiture; how with a final sniff she had turned and passed out between the ironical files that drew aside for her in the porchway. . . . For a burden had fallen from his heart: his little mistake, just now, weighed as nothing against the assurance that Dr. Mant would write a certificate and settle these meddlesome idiots at the Troy Custom-house. . . . Moreover Dr. Mant, who passed for a knowledgeable fellow in his profession, had as good as assured him that his leg was nothing to die of; not just yet, anyway. Well, he would have it attended to, sometime; his life was valuable now. But he wasn't going to hurry about it, if a sound leg meant his being taken and ordered off to this dam-fool War. Nicky-Nan pursed up his lips as he worked, whistling to himself a cheerful, tuneless ditty.

Someone tapped on the door.

"Who's there?"

"It's me," answered the voice of Mrs. Penhaligon. "Can I come in?"

"No, you can't!" he shouted. "Here, wait a minute! . . . And what might be the matter now?" he asked, as he opened the door a very little way. "I'm sorry, ma'am, that I can't ask 'ee to step inside; but there's a tidyin'-up goin' forward."

"I'd as lief to speak to 'ee here, in the passage. Indeed I'd rather," said Mrs. Penhaligon as he emerged, trowel in hand.

"Well, what is it?"

She hesitated a moment. "'Tis a hard thing for a woman to say. . . . But maybe 'tis turnin' out you are?" she suggested brightly.

"Turnin' out?"

"That would simplify things, o' course. And everybody knowin' that Pamphlett's served you with a notice to quit——"

But thereupon Nicky-Nan exploded. "Served me with a notice, did he? Pamphlett! . . . Well, yes he did, if you want to know. But never you fret: I'm upsides with Pamphlett. This is my house, ma'am: an' here I bide till it pleases me to quit."

"O—oh!" sighed Mrs. Penhaligon dejectedly, "then it puts me in a very awkward position, if you don't mind my sayin' so."

"How is it awkward, ma'am?" asked Nicky-Nan, rubbing his unshaven chin with the point of the trowel.

"Well, Mr. Nanjivell, I dare say you meant it well enough. But I have my reputation to think about; an' the children, God bless 'em! I grant that Polsue body to be a provokin' woman. She 'ave a way with

her that drives me mad as a sheep. But, if you don't mind me tellin' 'ee, you men have no sense—not a mother's son of 'ee. Not a doubt my Sam'd ha' spoke up just as fierce as you did. But then, you see, he's my Sam."

"Very like 'tis my dullness, ma'am," said Nicky-Nan, still delicately scraping his jaw-bristles with the trowel; "but I don't catch your drift, even now."

"Then I'll speak plainer. Where was the sense to blurt out afore a lot o' naybours as *you*'d see I didn' come to want? Be I the kind o' woman to take any help but my own man's?—even if you had it to give, which 'tis well beknown as you haven't."

"Oh, damn!" He swore as if a wasp had stung him: and indeed he had jabbed the point of the trowel into his jaw. After a pause he added, "The naybours know—do they?—as I couldn' act up to what I promised that woman, not if I tried. Very well, then. Where's the harm done? . . . I cleared her out, anyway."

Mrs. Penhaligon eyed him with pity for a moment. "Yes," she sighed, "that's just the plumb-silly way my Sam would talk: and often enough he've a-driven me just wild with it. Men be all of one mould. . . . Mr. Nanjivell, you've no great experience o' women. But did 'ee ever know a woman druv to the strikes[1] by another woman? An' did 'ee ever know a woman, not gone in the strikes, that didn' keep some wit at the back of her temper? . . . *I* was dealin' with Mrs. Polsue, don't you make any mistake."

"It struck me that she had been distressin' you, an' you'd be glad to get the rids of her."

"So I *was* in distress. But I had th' upper hand,

[1] Hysterics.

'specially wi' those women hearkenin' and everyone hatin' her. . . . What must happen, but forth you steps with a 'Leave this to me. *I*'ll look after Mrs. Penhaligon. *I*'ll see *she* don't come to want'—all as bold as a fire-hose. '*I*'ll clear 'ee out o' this house, which is *our* house,' says you—or to that effect. I wasn' so mad but, when I heard 'ee, there was time to glimpse Mother Climoe's face. Oh yes! I know what you'll be sayin'. 'Talk, is it?' you'll be sayin', just like my Sam: an' 'Let them talk. What's talk?'—an' talk, all the time, two-thirds of every decent woman's life!"

"I never heard such dratted nonsense in all my born days."

"That's because you was never married. You'd have heard it from a wife, half your time, though I dare say"—Mrs. Penhaligon sighed—"'twould ha' been with you like the rest. . . . 'A nice cauch Mr. Nanjivell's made of it,' said I to myself, getting back to the kitchen: 'but he's under notice to quit: and if he quits quick an' delicate, mebbe there's no great harm done.' So I came along to ask you about it."

At this point Nicky-Nan fairly lost command of his temper.

"So you're one wi' the rest, eh? All in one blasted conspiracy to turn me to doors! One comes threatenin', t'other comes carneyin', but all endin' in the same lidden.[1] 'Your health ben't the best, Nanjivell: let me recommend a change of air.' 'Nanjivell, you're a fine upstandin' fellow, an' young for your age. Why don't 'ee leg it off to the War?' 'These be hard times, Nanjivell; so I'm forced to ask 'ee for your rent, or out you go.' An' now along you come wi' the latest.

[1] Monotonous burthen.

'Would you mind makin' yourself scarce, Mr. Nanjivell, to oblige a lady as has lost confidence in her repitation?' Now look 'ee here, ma'am—what I said to that woman Polsue, just now, is no more than I'm able to abide by. If the shoe pinches at any time, you can come to me, and I'll reckon up wi' Sam Penhaligon when he comes back. What's more—though, to be sure, 'tis no affair o' mine—I reckon Sam Penhaligon's the only chap alive, savin' yourself, consarned in this repitation you've started to make such a fuss about. But you're playin' Pamphlett's game, ma'am, to turn me out," wound up Nicky-Nan wrathfully, turning away: "that's what you're doin': and I'll see you——"

He closed the oath upon a slam of the door.

"There was never a man in this world," sighed Mrs. Penhaligon as she regained her own kitchen, "but hisself came afore all the world." She arrested her hand on the cover of the flour-barrel.

"He talked so confident of his money, too. . . . Funny thing if Nicky-Nan, that we've been pityin' all this time, should turn out to be a miser!"

An hour later, in the full light of the afternoon sunshine, Nicky-Nan emerged from the old house with a shovel on his arm and a bundle dangling from it. He had heard 'Bert Penhaligon say that the Boy Scouts were employed by night only for coast-watching. By day the pilots with their telescopes habitually commanded this whole stretch of coast, nor could the periscope of a submarine push itself above the inshore water and not be detected.

At the corner of the Warren, where the cliff turns eastwardly with a sharp bend, Nicky-Nan almost ran

into Policeman Rat-it-all, who pulled himself up for a chat as usual.

"I don't know what *you* think," observed the Policeman, "but to my mind this here War gives us a great sense o' brotherhood. I read that on the newspaper this mornin', and it struck me as one o' the aptest things I'd seen for a long while."

"You said something o' the sort last time we met," answered Nicky-Nan.

"You're wrong there." Rat-it-all seemed to be slightly hurt in his feelings; "because I read it on the paper only this morning. 'Against War in the abstrac' much may be urged,' it said. 'But 'oo will deny as it begets a sense o' Brotherhood if it does nothin' else?' That was the expression."

"I don't take much truck in this War, for my part," said Nicky-Nan, quartering on the narrow footpath to let Rat-it-all pass: "but it'll do a dam sight else afore we're through with it, if you want my opinion."

"To a man in the Force," said Rat-it-all pensively, "an expression like that, mixed up with photographs in the *Daily Mirror*, strikes HOME. A man in the Force, as I'll put it, is in some ways unlike other men." He paused to let this sink in.

"Take your time," said Nicky-Nan. "But I'm not contradictin' 'ee."

"If they're a species, he's a specie—a man set apart, like a parson. A parson tells you how you ought to behave, and I take you in charge if you don't."

"Like Satan," Nicky-Nan suggested.

"Rat it all! Not a bit like Satan!" said the Constable angrily. "You've not been followin'. I never heard so foolish an interruption in all my born days. . . .

What be you carryin' in that there bundle, makin' so bold?"

Nicky-Nan felt his heart stand still. "Just my waskit an' a few odds an' ends," he answered with affected nonchalance. Forcing himself to meet Rat-it-all's gaze, and perceiving it to be dreamy rather than suspicious, he added, "What makes 'ee ask?"

"Nothin', . . . nothin'. . . . Only you reminded me of a song I used to sing, back in the old days. It was called 'Off to Philadelphia in the mornin'.' A beautiful voice I used to have: tenor. I shouldn' wonder if I had it yet; only"—with a wistful sigh—"in the Force you got to put that sort o' thing behind you, . . . which brings me back to what I was saying. In an ordinary way, a police-constable's life is like a parson's: they see more 'n most men o' what's goin' on, but they don't *belong* to it. You can't properly hobnob with a chap that, like as not, you'll be called on to marry or bury to-morra, nor stand him a drink—nor be stood—when, quite as like, next time you'll be servin' a summons. There's a certain Jane on both sides."

"A who?"

"'Tisn' a ''oo,' 'tis an 'it': being an expression I got off an Extension Lecturer they had down to Bodmin, one time. I'd a great hankerin', in those days, to measure six foot two in my socks afore I finished growin', and I signed on for his lectures in that hope. With a man callin' hisself by that name and advertisin' as he'd lecture on "Measure for Measure,' I thought I'd a little bit of all right. But he ran right off the rails an' chatted away about the rummiest things, such as theatricals. I forget what switched 'en off an' on to that partic'lar line: but I well remember his openin' remark. He

said, 'To measure the true stature of a great man we must go down to the true roots. A certain Jane is bound to overtake us if we dig too long among the common 'taturs with their unstopp'd lines an' weak endings and this or that defective early quart. Oh! all profitable, no doubt, an' worth cultivatin' so long as we do not look for taste.' When I woke up at the end 'twas with these words printed in mind same as they've remained. But I couldn' figure out how this here Jane got mixed up in the diet. So, bein' of a practical mind then, in my 'teens, same as I be to-day, I stopped behind and asked him—takin' care to look bright and intelligent—who might be this Jane he'd allooded to. If you'll believe me, it turned out to be no person at all, but a way the gentry have of sayin' they're uncomfortable; same as, through some writin' chap or other, all the papers was talkin' of your belly as your Little Mary."

"Mine?"

"When I say 'yours,' o' course I mean to say 'ours' —that's to say, everyone's." Rat-it-all made a semi-circular sweep of the hand in front of his person.

"Something of a liberty, I should say, however many you include. What I object to in these newspapers is the publicity. . . . But, if you ask my opinion, that Extension fellow made a start with pullin' your leg."

"You're wrong, then. For I tried the expression 'pon Parson Steele only two days ago. 'This here war, sir,' I took occasion to say, 'fairly gives me the Jane.' He reckernised the word at once, an' lugged out his note-book. 'Do you know, constable,' says he, 'that you're talkin' French, an' it's highly interestin'?' 'I make no doubt as 'twould be, sir,' says I, 'if I was

to hold on with it.' 'You don't understand,' says he. 'These Gallic turns o' speech'—which, 'tween you an' me, I'd always thought o' Gallic as a kind of acid—'these Gallic turns o' speech,' says he, 'be engagin' the attention of learned men to such an extent that I think o' writin' a paper upon 'em myself,' says he, 'for the Royal Institution o' Cornwall at their next Summer Meetin'.' . . . I was considerably flattered, as you may well understand. . . . But that brings me back to my point. Parsons an' constables, as I see the matter, be men set apart, an' lonely. So when I reads 'pon the paper that this here war has made us all brothers, it strikes HOME, an' I feel inclined to stop an' pass the time o' day with anybody. I don't care who he may be."

"Then why waste time danderin' along the cliffs, here?"

Policeman Rat-it-all lowered his voice. "Between you an' me, again," he confessed, "I got to do my four miles or so every day, for the sake o' my figger."

"'Tis unfortunate then," said Nicky-Nan, taking heart of grace and lying hardily: "for you've missed a lovely dog-fight."

"Where? Whose?" Rat-it-all panted, suddenly all alive and inquisitive.

"Dog-fights don't concern me. . . . It may ha' been Jago's bull-terrier an' that Airedale o' Latter's. Those two seldom meet without a scrap."

"Is it over?" A sudden agitation had taken hold of Rat-it-all's legs.

"Very like," lied Nicky-Nan, now desperately anxious to be rid of him. "I heard somebody callin' for snuff or a pot o' pepper—either o' which they tell me——"

"An' you've kept me dallyin' all this while how-de-doin'?" Rat-it-all made a bolt down the path.

Nicky-Nan watched his disappearing figure, and collapsed upon a thyme-scented hillock in sudden revulsion from a long strain of terror.

He sat there for a good five minutes, staring out on the open waters of the Channel. An armed cruiser, that had been practising gunnery at intervals during the day, was heading home from Plymouth. A tug had come out and was fetching back her targets. Nicky-Nan arose very deliberately, made for his 'taty-patch in the hollow beyond the pilot-house, laid his bundle on the ground, and began to dig in and cover his golden coins, fetching a handful at a time. He had buried them all, and was returning at shut of dusk, when he met young 'Bert Penhaligon coming up the path.

"This is the last night for us here," proclaimed young 'Bert, "and I can't say as I'm sorry. But maybe they'll move us."

"How so?" asked Nicky-Nan.

"Well, between you an' me," announced young 'Bert, who during the last week had seemed to put on stature with confidence, "there's a company of Royal Engineer Territorials ordered over from Troy to dig theirselves in an' camp here."

CHAPTER XVI

CORPORAL SANDERCOCK

Nicky-Nan arose with the dawn after a night of little sleep. Very cautiously, with one hand feeling the wall, and in the other carrying his boots, lest he should wake the Penhaligons, he stole downstairs to his parlour. The day being Sunday, he could not dare to risk outraging public opinion by carrying shovel or visgy through the open streets. To be sure nobody was likely to be astir at that hour: for Polpier lies late abed on Sunday mornings, the fishermen claiming it as their week's arrears of sleep. None the less it might happen: Un' Benny, for example, was a wakeful old man, given to rising from his couch unseasonably and walking abroad to commune with his Maker. For certain if Nicky-Nan should be met, going or coming, with a shovel on his shoulder, his dereliction from grace would be trumpeted throughout the parish, and—worse, far worse—it would excite curiosity.

In the parlour he provided himself with the plastering trowel and a sack, and wrapped the one in the other into a tight parcel, easily carried under the crook of his arm-pit. With this he tiptoed along the passage. There was no trouble with latch or bolt: for, save in tempestuous weather, the front door of the old house —like half the front doors of the town—stood open all night long. An enormous sea-shell, supposed of Pernambuco, served it for weight or "dog," holding it tight-jammed against the wall of the passage.

Nicky-Nan seated himself on the bench in the porchway and did on his boots. The light was very dim here, and his fingers trembled, so that he took a long time threading the laces through the eyelet-holes. He became aware that his nerves were shaken. At the best of times, with his hurt leg, he found this operation of lacing his boots one of the worst of the day's jobs. It cost him almost as much time as shaving, and far more pain.

But at length the laces were threaded and tied, and tucking his parcel under his arm he set forth. He had forgotten his walking-staff and dared not go back to fetch it. Moreover, in Polpier it is held to be inauspicious if, once started on an enterprise, you turn back for something you have forgotten: and Nicky-Nan, a sceptic by habit, felt many superstitions assailing him this morning. For instance, he had been careful to lace up his right boot before his left.

A high tide filled the inner pool of the harbour, and on its smooth surface several gulls floated, paddling lazily if at all. These birds know Sunday from weekdays as well as any Christian folk: which is nothing very wonderful, for the Polpier boats have lain at home all the night and there is no fish-offal drifting about. Nicky-Nan counted the birds carefully, and drew a breath of relief on assuring himself that they totalled fifteen—an odd number and a lucky one. But he had no sooner done so than, as if they had been waiting for him, to signal misfortune, two of the flock arose, pattered for a moment on the water, wheeled upward twice, thrice, in short circles, and sailed off. His heart sank as he did the small sum in subtraction: but he controlled himself, noting that they sailed off to the right.

It was pretty to see them rising out of the blue liquid shadow of the harbour-pool; rising until, in a flash, they took the morning sun-ray that struck almost level across the top of the chasm, and were transformed into winged jewels, dazzling the eye. But Nicky-Nan scarcely marked this, being preoccupied with his cares and fears: for where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. Nor did he note at the bend of the cliff, which brought him in turn, after a long climb, face to face with the sun, that already its beams were warming the dew-drenched cushions of thyme on either side of the track, and drawing delicious odour from them. The ray, smiting full in his eyes for a moment or two, hid from him all details of the landscape ahead and on his left, even as effectually as it hid the stars of night. Nicky-Nan hobbled on for a few paces, blinking. Then, with a catch of the breath, he came to a halt. His vision clearing by degrees, he let out a gasp and his knees shook under him.

A couple of hundred yards away, and for half a mile beyond that, the green turf was populous with soldiery!

For some miles east and west of our haven the coast-front runs, as it were, in two tiers. From the sea rises a sheer face of naked rock, averaging some two hundred feet in height, for the most part unscalable, but here and there indented with steep gully-ways, down each of which, through thickets of cow-parsley, flax, kale, and brambles, matted curtains of ground-ivy, tussocks of thrift and bladder-campion, a rivulet tumbles to the brine. Above this runs a narrow terrace or plat of short turf, where a man may walk with his hands in his pockets; and here, with many ups and downs, runs

the track used by the coastguard, who blaze the stones beside it at intervals with splashes of whitewash, for guidance on dark nights. Above this plateau, which here expands to a width of twenty or thirty feet and anon contracts almost to nothing, the cliff takes another climb, right away now to the skyline; but the acclivity is gentler, with funnel-shaped turfy hollows between bastions of piled rock not unlike Dartmoor tors or South African kopjes in miniature. On top of all runs a second terrace, much broader than the first, and a low hedge, beyond which, out of sight, the cultivated land begins.

Hard by the foot of one of these rock-bastions, on a fan-shaped plat of green, backed by clumps of ivy and wind-tortured thorns, a group of tents had sprung up like a cluster of enormous mushrooms. More tents aligned the upper terrace, under the lee of the hedge: and here also five or six wagons stood against the skyline, with men busy about them. Smaller knots of men in khaki toiled in the hollows, dragging down poles, sleepers, bundles of rope, parcels of picks and entrenching spades for the lower camp. Twos and threes, perched precariously on the rock-ridges, held on to check-ropes, guiding the descent of the heavier gear. The sound of voices shouting orders came borne on the clear morning air; and above it, as Nicky-Nan halted, rose the note of a bugle, on which somebody was practising to make up for lost time in days of peace.

Nicky-Nan pulled his wits together and stumbled forward, terror in his heart. Could he reach the 'taty-patch and snatch his treasure before these invaders descended upon it?

The patch (as has been told) lay in a hollow, concealed from sight of the pilot-house. The cliff-track crossed

a sharp knoll and brought you upon it suddenly. Nicky-Nan's heart beat fast, and unconsciously he accelerated his hobble almost to a run. As he pulled up short on the edge of the dip a sob broke from him—almost a cry.

Below him a couple of men in khaki were measuring the hollow with a field-tape; while a third—an officer—stood almost midway between them pencilling notes in a book. The tape stretched clean across the potato-patch.

"Right!" announced the officer, not perceiving Nicky, whose shadow, of course, lay behind on the path.

The nearer man—a stout corporal—dropped his end of the measuring-tape. The other wound it up slowly.

"We'll have to lay the trench through here," said the officer; and quoted, "'I'm sorry for Mr. Naboth—I'm sorry to cause him pain'; but you, corporal, must find him and tell him he'll get compensation for disturbance." He pocketed his notebook, turned, and mounted the slope towards the encampment. The soldier holding the spool on the far side of the dip finished winding the tape very leisurably; which gave it the movement and appearance of a long snake crawling back to him across Nicky-Nan's potato-tops and over Nicky-Nan's fence. Then, shutting the spool with a click, he turned away and followed his officer. The stout corporal, left alone, seated himself on a soft cushion of thyme, drew forth a pipe from his hip-pocket, and was in the act of lighting it when Nicky-Nan descended upon him.

"And 'oo may *you* be?" asked the stout corporal, turning about as he puffed.

"You—you've no business here!" stammered Nicky wrathfully. "The first sojer I catch trespassin' on my piece o' ground, I'll have the law on him!"

"Hallo! Be you the owner o' this patch, then?"

"Yes, I be: and I tell 'ee you've no business messin' around my property."

The corporal removed the pipe from his mouth and rubbed its bowl softly against the side of his nose. "So you said, to be sure. I didn' laugh at the moment, not bein' a triggerish chap at a joke. But it'll come in time. That's why I joined the sappers."

"Eh?"

"I takes a pleasure in *redoocin'* things. . . . Well, if you be the owner o' this here patch, the pleasure is mootual, for you've saved me time an' trouble over and above your speakin' so humorous. And what might your name be, makin' so bold?"

"Nanjivell."

"You don't say so! . . . Christian name?"

"Nicholas."

"'Tis a fair co-incidence," mused the corporal aloud. "I knew a man once by the name of Nanjivell—a fish-dealer; but he was called Daniel, an' he's dead, what's more. I remember him all the better, because once upon a time, in my young days, I made a joke upon him, so clever it surprised myself. It began with my sendin' in a bill 'Account rendered' that he'd already paid. I started by tellin' 'ee that I was young at the time. 'Twas before I married my wife to look after the books, an' I won't say that I wasn' a bit love-struck an' careless. Anyway, in went that dam bill; and he'd kep' the receipt, which made him fair furious. Mad as fire he was, an' wrote me a letter about it. Such a

saucy letter! 'Twas only last Christmas or thereabouts I found it in my desk an' tore it up. But I got even with him. 'Dear sir,'—I wrote back, 'your favour of the 5th instant received an' unchristian spirit of the same duly noted. On inquiry I find the 3lb. of sausages to esteemed order was paid for on Lady-day; which on cooler thoughts you will see in the light of a slip as might have happened to anybody. Which in fact it did in this case. *P.S.*—Nanjivell ought to rhyme with *civil*. What a mistake when it rhymes with D——!—Yours faithfully'—and I signed my name. Then, on second thoughts, I tacked on another postscript. At this distance o' time I can't be sure if 'twas 'Flee from the Wrath to Come' or 'The Wages o' Sin is Death'—but I think the latter, as bein' less easily twisted into a threat. . . . That," added the corporal after a pause, "closed the correspondence."

"And where," Nicky-Nan asked, "might all this have happened?"

"At Penryn: which, for electoral purposes, is one borough with Falmouth. . . . I hoped as you would ha' laughed: but I'm glad to find you interested, anyway. Sandercock is my name, if you can make anything o' that,—Eli Sandercock, Fore Street, Penryn, pork and family butcher. You've heard o' Sandercock's hog's-puddin's I don't doubt?"

"Never."

"Haven't travelled much, maybe?"

"Knocked about a little. . . . Mostly on the China station an' South Pacific."

"Ah, they're hot climates, by all accounts. They wouldn't—no, o' course they wouldn't——"

"Wouldn't *what*?"

"Bring you into contact, so to speak. . . . You should see my vi'lets, too."

"Violets?"

"They go together. You may notice the same thing in Truro: everybody that sells pork sells vi'lets."

"Damme if I can see the connexion——"

"You wouldn't—not at first. Vi'lets is a delicate way of advertisin' that there's an *r* in the month, an' your pork by consequence can be relied on. My wife, too, is never happy without a great bowlful o' vi'lets on the counter, done up in bunches: she thinks they suit her complexion. Now this patch o' yours 'ld be the very place to raise vi'lets. I was thinkin' so just now when I measured it. Suffer much from red-spider in these parts?"

"Not so far as I know. . . . But 'tis a curious thing," went on Nicky-Nan, "to find a man like you turned to sojerin'."

"Ah," cried Corporal Sandercock, eager for sympathy, "yes, well you may say that! It seems like a dream. . . . Of course in the pork-business August is always a slack month, an' this blasted War couldn' have happened at a more convenient season for pork, not if the Kaiser had consulted me."

"But what drove 'ee to it?"

"Into the Engineers? Well, 'tis hard to say. . . . I always had leanin's: an' then the sausages preyed on my mind—they look so much like fuses. So, what with one thing and another, and my wife likin' to see me in scarlet, with piping down my legs, which is what we used to wear on Sundays—— 'Tis a long story, however, an' we can talk it over as we're diggin up yer 'taties."

"Diggin' up my 'taties'?" Nicky-Nan echoed with a quaver. "Let me catch you tryin' it!"

"Now, we're comin' to business," said Corporal Sandercock. "*That's* what the O.C. told me—Captain Whybro, commandin' Number 4 Works Company, Cornwall Fortress Royal Engineers. 'Here's where we carry our first trench,' says he; 'an' here, if wit o' man can grasp the why or the wherefore,' says he, 'is a filthy potato-patch lyin' slap across our line. Corporal,' says he to me, 'you're a family man an' tactful. I detach you,' says he, 'to search the blighter out an' request him to lift his crop without delay. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' says he, 'an' the more you run around the better it'll be for your figure, an' the more you'll thank me,' he winds up, 'when we march together into Berlin.' So now you understand how welcome you dropped in. . . . 'Tis a terribly hilly country hereabouts."

"If there's law in England," Nicky-Nan threatened, "you'll keep clear o' this here patch o' mine, or it'll be the worse for 'ee!"

Corporal Sandercock seated himself leisurably on a hillock of thyme, began to knock out his pipe against the edge of his boot-sole, and suddenly exploded in laughter so violent that he was forced to hold his sides. The exhibition took Nicky-Nan right aback. He could but stand and stare.

"Oh, oh!" panted the corporal. After another paroxysm he gasped, "You'll excuse me, but that's how I get taken. 'You've got no business here' was your words." (Another paroxysm.) "You can't think how comical you said it, either."

"Comical or not, I mean it," Nicky-Nan assured

him, with a saturnine frown. "If you can give over holdin' your belly an' listen, I don't mind tellin' you my opinion o' this here War; which is, that 'tis a put-up job from start to finish, with no other object than to annoy folks."

The corporal sat up, wiping his eyes. "That's a point o' voo," he admitted, and added guardedly, "I don't say as I agree: but I'd like to know how, comin' upon all of us so suddent, it strikes a man like you, dwellin' in these out-o'-the-way parts. My wife declares she've seen matters workin' up to it for years."

"I never thought about it, one way or t'other, an' I don't want to think about it now. Who in the world *wants* war? Not I for one."

"Me either, if it comes to that," Corporal Sandercock allowed, refilling his pipe. "If the matter had rested with me, I'd ha' gone on forming fours every Wednesday an' Saturday, contented enough, all the rest o' my life. But the great ones of earth will have it, the Kaiser especially: and, after that, there's no more to say. The Kaiser wants a place in the sun, as he puts it; an' 'tis our bounden duty as true Britons to see he don't get any such thing."

"I never heard tell as he expressed a hankerin' for my 'taty-patch," answered Nicky-Nan sourly. "The way I look at it is, *he* leaves me alone in quiet, an' you don't. A pack o' sojers messin' about a spot like this!" he added with scorn. "It affronts a decent man's understandin'. But 'tis always the same wi' sojers. In the Navy, when I belonged it, we had a sayin'—'A messmate afore a ship-mate, a ship-mate afore a dog, an' a dog afore a sojer.'"

"To judge by your appearance," said the corporal

with no sign of umbrage, "that was some time ago, afore they started the Territorial movement. . . . Ever study what they call Stradegy? No?—I thought not. Stradegy means that down below your patch there's a cove o' sorts: where there's a cove there's a landin'-place; where you can get a light gun ashore you can clear the shore till you find a spot to land heavy guns. Once you've landed heavy guns you've a-took Plymouth in the rear. You follow me?" Corporal Sandercock stood up and picked up a crumb or two of tobacco from the creases of his tunic. "I'll go fetch a fatigue party to harvest these spuds o' yours," said he. "There'll be compensation for disturbance. If you like, you can come along an' bargain it out wi' the O.C."

"No," said Nicky-Nan, snatching at this happy chance. "I'm a lame one, as you see. What must be, must, I suppose: but while you step along I'll bide here."

"So long, then!"

The corporal had no sooner turned his back than Nicky began to unwrap his bundle in a fumbling haste. He watched the rotund figure as it waddled away over the rise; and so, dropping on his knees, fell to work furiously. The sun was already making its warmth felt. In less than five minutes the sweat trickled off his forehead and dropped on his wrists as he dug with his unhandy trowel and grabbed at the soil.

Something more than a quarter of an hour had passed when, looking up for the fiftieth time, he spied the corporal returning down the grassy slope, alone. By this time his job was nearly done; and after finishing it he had the presence of mind to dig up a quart or so

of potatoes and spread them over the gold coins in his sack.

"What in thunder's your hurry?" demanded the corporal, halting for a moment on the crest of the rise and gazing down. "I told you as I'd fetch a party to clear the patch for you; an', what's more, the spuds shall be delivered to your door sometime this very day. But the Captain can't spare a man this side o' nine o'clock, an' so I was to tell you." He descended the slope, mopping his brow. "Pretty good tubers?"

Nicky-Nan hypocritically dived a hand into the sack, drew forth a fistful, and held them out in his open palm.

"Ay, and a very tidy lot," the corporal nodded. "And what might be the name of 'em?"

"*Duchess o' Cornwall* they're called: one o' the new Maincrops, an' one o' the best. East-country grown. You may pull half a dozen or so for yourself if you'll do me the favour to accept 'em."

"Thank 'ee, friend. There's nothin' I relish more than a white-fleshed 'taty, well-grown an' well-boiled. Not a trace o' disease anywhere," observed the corporal, running his eye over the rows and bringing it to rest on the newly-turned soil at his feet. "Eh? Hallo!"

He stooped and picked up a sovereign.

"That's mine!" Nicky-Nan claimed it hastily. "I must ha' dropped it——"

"Well, *I* didn', anyway — an' that's honest." The corporal handed it over with just a trace of reluctance. "But it only shows," he added, eyeing Nicky-Nan thoughtfully, "as there's nothing in this world so deceptive as appearances."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND SERMON

"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.

. . . And thou shalt be called by a new name. . Thou shalt no more be termed *Forsaken*; neither shall thy land be termed *Desolate*; but thou shalt be called *Hephzibah*, and thy land *Beulah*: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. . . .

. . . I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night.

. . . The Lord hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, 'Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured. But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it . . . in the courts of my holiness.'

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, 'Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him,' and his work before him. And they shall call them 'The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord,' and thou shalt be called, '*Sought out, A City Not Forsaken.*'"

Mr. Hambly closed the great Book upon the cushion and leaned forward, resting his arms over it.

"I want you," said he after a pause, very solemnly and slowly, "to apply those words not only to ourselves, of whom we are accustomed to think, too particularly and too complacently, as a chosen people; but to the whole of the free peoples of Western Europe, with whom to-day we stand in alliance and as one. If you apply them at all particularly, let France and Belgium be first in your minds, with their harvest-fields and vineyards, as you listen to the Lord's promise, '*By the arm of my strength, surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies, and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine for which thou hast laboured.*'

"For our own land, England, if we are really to vindicate it out of this struggle as Beulah—that is, 'married,' the bride of the Lord—I wish you to consider how far the God of this noble oath has advanced upon the old bloodthirsty Jehovah of the book of Joshua. He is not yet, in Isaiah, the all-living, all-comprehending God the Father of the Gospel: but if we halt on Him here, we are already a long way advanced from that tribal and half-bestial conception of the Deity which Joshua invoked and (as it seems to me) the German Emperor habitually invokes.

"I see no harm in priding ourselves that we have advanced beyond the German Emperor's schoolboyish conception of Jehovah. As a greater and far more highly bred and educated Emperor—an Emperor of Rome—once warned us, 'The best part of revenge is not to be like them.'

"Well, that is the point on which I would specially caution you this morning. When an adversary suddenly and brutally assaults us, his ferocity springing from the instinct of a lower civilisation—as when a farm-dog

leaps upon us in the road—our first instinct is to fall back and meet him on the ground of his own savagery, to give him an exact tit for his tat. But can you not see that, as we do this, and in proportion as we do it, we allow him to impose himself on us and relinquish our main advantage? It is idle to practise a higher moral code, if we abandon it hurriedly as soon as it is challenged by a lower.

"Bearing this in mind, you will not in the next few minutes say to yourselves, 'Our minister has ill chosen his time—now, with the enemy at our gates—to be preaching to us that we should be confirming what little hold we have on the divine purpose, to advance upon it; to counsel our striving to pierce further into the mind of God; when all the newspapers tell us that, for success in war, we should enter into the minds of our enemies.'

"For, let me tell you, all knowledge is one under God; and the way of theology—which should be the head and crown of the sciences—not different from the way of what we call the 'natural' sciences, such as chemistry, or geology, or medicine. Of wisdom we may say with Ecclesiasticus: *The first man knew her not perfectly, neither shall the last man find her out.* But that does not matter. What matters for us, in our generation, is that we improve our knowledge and use it to make ourselves *comparatively* wiser—comparatively, that is, with our old selves as well as with our enemies. 'Knowledge,' they say, 'is power'; which, if it mean anything, must mean that A, by knowing a little more than B, has made himself, to that extent, more powerful than B.

"Now by saying that the way of all the sciences is one, I mean just this: that the true process of each is

to refer effects to their real causes, not to false ones, and in the search to separate what is relevant from what is irrelevant and—so far as we can discover—quite accidental. For example, when a pestilence such as typhoid fever broke out in Polpier five or six hundred years ago, your forefathers attributed it to the wrath of God visiting them for their sins: and to be sure it is good that men, under calamity, should reflect on their sins, but only because it is good for them to reflect on their sins at all times and under any circumstance. Nowadays you would have your well-water analysed and ask what the Sanitary Inspector had been about. Or, again, if a fire were to devastate our little town, we should not smite our breasts in the manner of those same forefathers, and attribute it to what there is amongst us of sloth and self-indulgence, to God's wrath upon our drinking habits or our neglect of Sunday observance: we should trace it to a foul chimney and translate our discovery into a By-law, maybe into a local Fire Brigade. That is how men improve their knowledge, and, through their knowledge, their well-being—by sifting out what is relevant.

"Do you suppose that irrelevances account for this war any more than they account for a fire or a pestilence; or that they will any more help us to grapple with it? Truly it would seem so," sighed Mr. Hambly. "A great deal of fervid stuff was uttered in England last Sunday by archbishops, bishops, presidents of this and that Free Church; and the 'religious newspapers' have been full of these utterances. God forgive my presumption that, as I walk the streets of Polpier, I seem to hear all these popular men preaching with acceptance about nothing in particular!

"They all start by denouncing or deploring Germany's obvious sins: her exaltation of Might against Right, her lust of world-dominion, the ruthlessness of her foreign policy, the vainglorious boastings of her professors. No great harm in this!—for all these have contributed to bring this war about, and are therefore relevant. But when the preacher turns to the examination—for us so much more profitable—of *our own* sins, what has the preacher to say? Why, always in effect that, though it passeth comprehension why Germany should be chosen to punish us (being so much worse than ourselves), we deserve punishment somehow for our drinking, swearing, and gambling habits, for the state of the poor in our cities, for our worship of wealth, for having a Liberal Government. . . .

"Absurd as it may seem, that last gets nearest to sense; for wars are made, or at any rate accepted by, governments; and in a democratic country the government of the day represents the nation, or the nation is to blame. But believe me, my friends, God does not punish in this haphazard way. He punishes scientifically; or rather He allows men to punish themselves, by reaping the evil from the cause they have planted or neglected to remove: and the harvest comes true to the seed.

"The War as yet is scarcely a week old. It came upon us like a thief in the night, and as yet none of us can tell how far we are blameworthy. We have not the evidence.

"There will be time enough, when we have it, to search out the true reasons for national penitence. I do not believe in being penitent at haphazard: I have too much respect for that spiritual exercise. Still less

do I believe in running up to God's mercy-seat with a lapful of unassorted sins and the plea, 'Dear Lord, we are doubtless guilty of all these. Being in affliction, we are probably right in believing that one or more of them has provoked Thy displeasure, and are ready to do penance for any if it will please Thee to specify. Meanwhile, may we suggest horse-racing or profane language?' We may be sure, *then*, that the sin suggested, as a conjurer forces a card, is not a relevant one. We may be fairly sure also that it is one with which some neighbour is more chargeable than are we ourselves. The priests of Baal were foolish to cut themselves with knives, but it is to be set to their credit that they used real ones.

"You will observe that Isaiah constantly, in his words of highest promise to her, speaks of Zion as to be redeemed, and her glory as something to be restored: which implies that her bliss will lie, not in acquiring some new possession, but in regaining a something she has lost or forfeited. Have we of England in our day built such a Jerusalem that merely *to have it again* is our dearest hope for the end of this War?

"I come back to my main proposition, and will conclude with one word of immediate practical advice —the best I can offer, as a plain man, in these days when the minds of all are confused.

"My main proposition is that, all knowledge being one in its process, our best chance of reading God's mind lies in thinking just as practically, rationally, relevantly about divine things as scientific men take care to do about scientific things, and as you or I should take care to do about the ordinary things of life. If we only thought of God as *important* enough, we should

do that as a matter of course. *If we then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children . . .* We in England to-day are as yet a long way off the philosophy of Jesus Christ. That is too hard for us altogether, it seems. But we ought to be abreast with Isaiah, which is a long way ahead of Joshua and the German Emperor.

"For my word of practical advice—I counsel you, as a people, not to waste time in flurried undiscriminating repentance; not to *fuss*, in short, until, having learnt where and how you ought to repent, you can repent effectually. That knowledge may come soon: more likely it will come late. Meanwhile the danger is instant. Every man in this church," concluded Mr. Hambly, "has a strong sense—a conviction, which I share—that the cause of England is right, that she is threatened and calls to him as he has never heard her call in his lifetime: and the call is to fight for her, but as men not straying to learn a new gospel of hate, remembering rather what at the best our Country has been, and proud to vindicate that."

"Silly old rigmarole," commented Miss Oliver on the way home. "If you can tell me what it was all about!"

"If 'twas no worse than silly there'd be no harm done. When it comes to hinting that the Almighty hasn't a purpose of His own for typhoid fever, in my opinion it's time someone made a public protest."

"I don't see what good that would do. On his own showing it'd lie between the Lord an' Scantlebury, the Sanitary Inspector. He'd no business to speak so pointed: an' I always hate personalities for my part. But I dare say Scantlebury won't mind, if it comes to his ears even——"

"Scantlebury!" exclaimed Mrs. Polsue with a sniff. "He only got the job through his son's being a local preacher and him a freemason. Do you think Scantlebury could make typhoid fever, if he tried?"

"Well, no; if you put it in that way. A Board School was as high as ever his parents could afford to send him and then he went into the greengrocery, and at one time was said to be going to fail for over three hundred, when this place was found for him. A fair-spoken little man, but scientific in no sense o' the word."

There was a pause.

"The silly man collected himself towards the end," said Mrs. Polsue. "There was sense enough in what he said about every man's duty just now—that it was to fight, not to argue; though, after his manner, he didn't pitch it half strong enough. . . . I've been thinking that very thing over, Charity Oliver, ever since the Vicarage meetin', and it seems to me that if we're to be an Emergency Committee in anything better than name, our first business should be to stir up the young men to enlist. The way these tall fellows be hangin' back, and their country callin' out for them! There's young Seth Minards, for instance; an able-bodied young man if ever there was one. But I don't mind telling you I'm taking some steps to stir up their consciences."

"I did hear," said her friend sweetly, "that you had been stirring up the women. In fact it reached me, dear, that Mrs. Penhaligon had already chased you to the door with a besom—and she was the mildest woman, which no doubt you reckoned on for a beginning. But if you mean to tackle the young men as well—though

I can't call to mind that the Vicarage meetin' set it down as any part of your duties——"

"I don't take my orders from any Vicarage meeting," snapped Mrs. Polsue; "not at any time, and least of all in an emergency like this, when country and conscience call me together to a plain duty. As for Mrs. Penhaligon, you were misinformed, and I advise you to be more careful how you listen to gossip. The woman was insolent, but she did *not* chase me—as you vulgarly put it, no doubt repeating your informant's words—she did *not* chase me out of doors with a besom. On the contrary, she gave me full opportunity to say what I thought of her."

"Yes; so I understood, dear: and it was after that, and in consequence (as I was told) that she——"

"If you are proposing, Charity Oliver, to retail this story to others, you may drag in a besom if you will. But as a fact Mrs. Penhaligon resorted to nothing but bad language, in which she was backed up by her co-habitant, or whatever you prefer to call him, the man Nanjivell."

"Yes, I heard that he took a hand in it."

"There you are right. He took a hand in it to the extent of informing me that Mrs. Penhaligon was under his charge, if you ever heard anything so brazen. . . . I have often wondered," added Mrs. Polsue, darkly musing, "why Polpier has not, before this, become as one of the Cities of the Plain."

"Have you?" asked Miss Oliver. "If I let such a thought trouble my head, I'd scarce close an eye when I went to bed."

"But what puzzles me," went on Mrs. Polsue, "is how that Nanjivell found the pluck. Everyone knows

him for next door to a pauper: and yet he spoke up, as if he had pounds an' to spare."

"Perhaps you irritated him," suggested Miss Oliver. "Everybody knows that, poor as folks may be, if you try to set them right beyond a certain point——"

The two ladies, in this amiable converse, had drawn near to the bridge-end. They were suddenly aware of a party of six soldiers in khaki, headed by a corporal, advancing over the bridge in file. Each pair of soldiers carried between them a heavy sack, swinging it slowly as they marched.

The ladies drew aside, curious. The soldiers halted in front of the Old Doctor's House. The corporal—a stout man—walked into the porchway and knocked.

Mrs. Penhaligon answered the knock, and after a short colloquy was heard to call back into the passage summoning Mr. Nanjivell.

In half a minute Nicky-Nan hobbled out. Meanwhile, their passage over the bridge being clear ahead, our two ladies had no good excuse for lingering. Yet they lingered. When all was said and done, no such sight as that of seven soldiers in khaki had been witnessed in Polpier within living memory. The child population of Polpier was indoors, expectant of dinner; and the squad missed the compliment of attention that would certainly have been paid it ten minutes earlier or an hour later.

"Here are your spuds," announced Corporal Sandercock, "with the Commandin' Officer's compliments." He paused, seemingly in wrestle with an inward reluctance. He plunged his right hand into his breeches pocket. "And here," said he, "be two sovereigns picked up in addition to the one you dropped this

mornin'. It softens my surprise a bit," Corporal Sandercock added, "now that I see the house you occupy and," with a glance at Mrs. Penhaligon—"the style you maintain. But for a man o' seemin'ly close habits, you're terribly flippant with your loose gold."

CHAPTER XVIII

FEATHERS

When Polpier folk had occasion to talk of soldiers and soldiering—a far-away theme to which the mind seldom wandered—their eyes would become pensive and their voices take an accent of pity tinged with gentle contempt. "There were such men. People back inland, among various strange avocations, followed this one; at a shilling a-day, too!" Some months before, as young Seth Minards happened to be dandering along the western cliff-track, he was met and accosted by an officer in uniform, who asked him many questions about the coast, its paths, the coves where a boat might be beached in moderate weather, etc., and made notes on the margin of a map. "Who was that tall chap I see'd 'ee in talk with, up by th' Peak?" asked Un' Benny Rowett later in the day. "A Cap'n Something-or-other," answered Seth; "I didn't catch his full name." "Walked over from Troy, I s'pose? Queer how these ship-cap'ns enjoy stretchin' their legs after a passage—the furriners especially. But there! 'tis nat'ral." "He wasn' a ship-cap'n." "What? a mine-cap'n?—ay, to be sure, that accounts for the colour of his clothes. . . . Out o' work, was he? There's been a lot o' distress down in the Minin' District lately." "You're wrong again," said Seth: "he's a gun-sojer, or so he told me." "What, an *army*-cap'n? . . . But I oft to ha' guessed. Come to think, he didn' look scarcely more 'n that."

Polpier, indeed, had not seen a troop of soldiers since the Napoleonic era, when (as has been related) the Old Doctor raised a company of Volunteer Artillery. Here we were, after more than a hundred years, at war again for what the newspapers called "our national existence"; and behold within five days Polpier had become a centre of military activity! The people, who during those five days had talked more about the career of arms and those who followed it than in five decades before, had insensibly—or, at least, without sense of inconsistency—passed from amused contempt to a lively interest, even though in speech they kept to the old tone of light cynicism. Nor was this tone affected to cover a right-about face; it simply meant that a habit of speech could not quite so quickly as a habit of thought adapt itself to retreat.

Of a sudden, and almost before it could own to this nascent interest, Polpier found itself flattered and exalted to military importance. That Sunday afternoon the whole town pretermitted its afternoon nap and flocked up past the Warren to view the camp. As Miss Oliver observed, "It was an object-lesson: it brought home some of the realities of war to you."

"*Some*," agreed Mrs. Polsue. "If I was you, dear, I wouldn' gush over such things, but rather pray the Lord against sendin' too many of 'em. It wouldn' altogether surprise me," she added darkly, "if the after-consequences of this was worse than any Revival Meetin'."

The O.C. had very wisely let it be known that, though in future it would be necessary to draw lines about his encampment, station guards, and allow entrance only by written permit, on this first day the public were

welcome to roam among the tents and satisfy their curiosity. His company might be stationed here for some months to come, and he wished to start on neighbourly terms. He had been told, moreover, that Polpier as a recruiting-ground was virgin soil. His sappers were instructed, therefore, to make everyone welcome, and especially any likely-looking young men who asked questions or otherwise showed an interest.

Curiously enough—and strangely, unless you know Polpier and West-country people—it was the likely-looking young men who hung back and showed least interest that afternoon. A few of them who had sweethearts were jealous, perhaps: it is not pleasant when the girl you love suddenly abstracts from you the Sunday attention on which you have come to count and transfers it enthusiastically—even if generally—to a number of young strangers, artlessly surrendering to a certain glamour in them because they are doing what never occurred to you.

But in the main these young men hung back just because they were interested; because, being interested, they were shy. This camp spoke, or should speak, to *them*: its business, its proper meaning, could only be for *them*. They could not lay full account with the feeling. But these old men conning the gear and shaking heads so wisely—these middle-aged Sabbath couples pacing around and hanging on heel to wonder how the soldiers packed themselves at night into quarters so narrow, or advancing and peering among utensils of cookery—most of all the young women giggling while they wondered at this, that, or the other,—all were impertinent to the scene. Whatever War signified, it was a mystery for men, and for young men.

The crowd thinned towards five o'clock, which is Polpier's Sunday hour for tea. On a tussock of thyme above Nicky-Nan's freshly cleared patch—the very tussock on which Corporal Sandercock had rested that morning—young Obed Pearce, the farmer's son, sat and sucked at a pipe of extinct tobacco. Hunger of heart had dragged him down to have a look at the camp: then, coming in full sight of it, he had halted as before the presence of something holy, to which he dared approach no nearer.

He had arrived somewhat late in the afternoon, as the thick of the crowd was dispersing. He had no young woman to bring with him, to allay her curiosity. Farmers' sons marry late, and are deliberate in choosing. It is the traditional rule. Young fishermen, on the other hand, claim their sweethearts early and settle down to a long probation of walking-out, waiting their turn, while by process of nature, old people die and cottages fall empty.

Such is economic law in Polpier: and in accordance with it young Obed Pearce sat and drew at his pipe alone: whereas when young Seth Minards, by two years his junior, came along at a slow walk with hands deep in his trouser-pockets and no maiden on his arm or by his side, Obed felt no incongruity in challenging him.

"Hallo, young Seth! Not found a maid yet?"

"No: nor likely to." Young Seth halted. If he had not found a damsel it was not for lack of good looks. He had a face for a Raphael to paint; the face of a Stephen or a Sebastian; gloomed over just now, as he halted with his shoulders to the sunset. "I can't think o' such things in these times, Mr. Obed."

"Nor me," said the farmer's son, discovering that

his pipe was out and feeling in his pocket for a box of matches.

"There's no hurry for you, Mr. Obed."

"Isn't there? . . . Well, I suppose not, thank goodness! Here, take a fill o' baccy, an' tell me what you think of it. I mean, o' course"—with a jerk of his hand towards the camp—"what you think o' that there?"

"I wish I could tell 'ee offhand," answered Seth after a pause, carefully filling his pipe. "I was puzzlin' it over as I came along."

"I see nothing to puzzle, for a man placed as you be," said Obed, drawing hard on his pipe. "If you had a father and a mother, now, both draggin' hard on your coat-tails—— My God!" he broke off, staring at the sappers moving on the hillside. "What wouldn't I give to be like any o' those?"

"If you feel it like that," Seth encouraged him, "the way's plain, surely? Father nor mother—no, nor wife nor child, if I had 'em—could hinder me."

"What hinders you then, lucky man?"

Seth smoked for a while in silence. "I don't think as I'd answer 'ee," he said at length quietly, "if I thought my answerin' would carry weight in your mind. *You* to call me lucky!—when your way's clear, and all you want is the will."

"We'll pass that," said Obed. "To you, that have none at home to hinder, ben't the way clear?"

"Since you ask me, 'tis not; or if clear, clear contrary."

"How should that be, in God's name?"

"I'd rather you didn' ask."

"But I do. . . . Look here, Seth Minards, I'm in

trouble: and I don't know how 'tis, but you're the sort o' chap one turns to. Sit down, now, like a friend."

Seth seated himself on the turf. "It's a strange thing, is War," said he after a pause. "All my life I've abominated it—yes, the very thought of it."

"All my life," said Obed. "I've reckoned it—I can't tell you why—the only test of a man."

"'Tis an evil thing: yes, to be sure, and a devilish," said Seth, musing. "Men killing one another—and the widows left, an' the orphans, on both sides. War's the plainest evil in all the world; and if I join in it, 'tis to help evil with my eyes open. All my life, sir, I've held by the Sermon on the Mount."

"I've read it," said Obed Pearce. "Go on."

"Without it I'm lost. Then along comes this very worst evil," he gazed towards the camp on the slope, "and here it is, callin' me in the name o' my Country, tauntin', askin' me why I can't make up my mind to be a man!" Seth checked a groan. "You see," he went on, "we looks at it, sir, in different ways, but they both hurt. I be main sorry if my own trouble o' mind adds any weight to your'n. But th' Bible says that, though one man's burden be 'most as heavy as another's, the pair may halve the whole load by sharin' it—or that's as I read the tex'."

Young Obed ground his teeth. "Maybe you haven't to endure *this* sort o' thing!" On a fierce impulse he pulled an envelope from his pocket, seemed to repent, then hardened his courage, and slowly drew forth—three white feathers. "It came to me this morning, anonymous." His face was crimson.

"Maybe I have," answered Seth tranquilly, and produced an envelope containing three feathers precisely

similar. "But what signifies a dirty trick o' that sort? It only tells what be in some other unfort'nate person's mind. It don't affect what's in my own."

"Hallo!" hailed a voice behind them. "Comparin' love-letters, you young men?"

The speaker was Nicky-Nan, come to survey the desolation of his 'taty-patch. Young Obed hastily crammed his envelope into his pocket. But Seth Minards turned about with a frank smile.

"You may see mine, Mr. Nanjivell. Look what some kind friend sent me this mornin'!"

"Well, I s'wow!" exclaimed Nicky-Nan, after a silence of astonishment. "If *I* didn' get such another Prince o' Wales's plume, an' this very mornin' too!"

"You?" cried the two young men together.

"See here"—Nicky in his turn pulled forth an envelope. "But what do it signify at all? 'Tis all a heathen mystery to me."

. . . . .

"Well, and how are we getting along?" asked the Vicar two days later, as he entered the morning-room where his wife sat busily addressing circulars and notices of sub-committee meetings.

She looked up, with a small pucker on her forehead. "I suppose it is drudgery; but do you know, Robert," she confessed, "I really believe I could get to like this sort of thing in time?"

He laughed, a trifle wistfully. "And do you know, Agatha, why it is that clergymen and their wives so seldom trouble the Divorce Court—in comparison, we'll say, with soldiers and soldiers' wives? . . . No, you are going to answer wrong. It isn't because the

parsons are better men — for I don't believe they are."

"Then it seems to follow that their wives must be better women!"

"You're wrong again. It's because the wife of a parish priest, even when she has no children of her own"—here the Vicar winced, flushed, and went on rapidly—"nine times out of ten has a whole parish to mother — clothing-clubs, Sunday-school classes, mothers' meetings, children's outings, choir feasts,— it's all looking after people, clothing 'em, feeding 'em, patting 'em on the head or boxing their ears and telling 'em to be good—which is just the sort of business a virtuous woman delights in. *She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens.* 'A portion to her maidens'; you see she used to measure out the butter in Solomon's time."

"It wouldn't do in this parish," she said with a laugh. "They'd give notice at once."

"God forgive me that I brought you to this parish, Agatha!"

"Now if you begin to talk like that—when I've really made a beginning!" She pointed in triumph to the stacks of missives on the writing-table.

"It's I who bungled, the other day, when I suggested your giving Mrs. Polsue a duplicate list of the names and addresses. I thought it would please her and save you half the secretarial labour; and now it appears that you *like* the secretarial labour!"

"What has happened?" Mrs. Steele asked.

"Well, young Obed Pearce rode over to see me yesterday. He's in great distress of mind, poor fellow; dying to enlist and serve his country, but held back

by his parents, who won't hear of it. As if this wasn't torture enough, in the midst of it he gets an envelope by post—addressed in a feigned hand, and with no letter inside, but just three white feathers."

"Oh, hateful! Who *could* be so wicked?"

"I met Lippity-Libby at the gate this morning. 'Look here,' I said; 'this is a pretty poison you are sowing on your rounds'; and I showed him the feathers which young Obed had left with me. 'I know *you* can't help it,' said I, 'but if the Post Office can stop and open suspected circulars surely it can refuse to help *this* abomination!' 'I've delivered pretty well a score, sir,' said he; 'and I wish you or some person would write to the papers and stop it.' 'Well,' I said, 'it's not for me to ask if you have a guess who sends this sort of thing about?' He rubbed his chin for a while and then answered: 'No, Parson; nor 'tisn't for me to tell 'ee if I do: but if you *should* happen to be strollin' down t'wards the Quay, you might take a look at Mrs. Polsue's Cochin-China hens. The way them birds have been moultin' since the War started——'"

"Robert! You don't tell me that woman plucks the poor things alive!"

"Ay: and takes the bleeding quills to draw more blood from young men's hearts."

CHAPTER XIX

I-SPY-HI!

At certain decent and regular intervals of time (we need not indicate them more precisely) Mrs. Polsue was accustomed to order in from the "Three Pilchards" a firkin of ale. A firkin, as the reader probably knows, is the least compromising of casks, and Mr. Latter regularly attended in person to "spile" it. Mrs. Polsue as regularly took care to watch the operation.

"The newspaper tells me," said she, "that this is likely to be a teetotal War."

"Tell me another, ma'am!" answered Mr. Latter in his unconventional way.

"It would be an excellent thing for our troops in the field: and, if you ask my opinion, a little mortifying of the spirit would do the working classes of this country a deal of good. I take a glass of ale myself, under medical advice, because cold water disagrees with me, and I've never yet had the aërated drink recommended that wasn't followed by flatulence."

"There's neither mirth nor music in 'em," agreed Mr. Latter.

"I do not seek either mirth or music in the little I make use of," Mrs. Polsue corrected him; "and on general grounds I agree with total abstinence."

[In this the lady said no more than the truth. She had lamented, scores of times, an infirmity of the flesh which, forbidding her to chastise the indulgence

of moderate drinking, protected a truly enormous class of fellow-creatures from her missionary disapproval. Often and often she had envied Charity Oliver, who could consume tea with hot sausages and even ham rashers. "To have the stomach of an ostrich must be a privilege indeed," she had once assured her friend; "though to be sure it tells on the complexion, forcing the blood to the face; so that (from a worldly point of view) at a distance a different construction might be put on it."]

"Tea with sausages, for instance!"

"The same here—Poison!" Mr. Latter agreed, delicately indicating where "here" lay for him.

"My father ever kept a generous table, which he was in a position to afford." Mrs. Polsue sighed, and added with resignation, "I suppose we must say that the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

"I wouldn' put it just like that, ma'am—not from what I've heard of the old gentleman's knowledge o' liquor."

"It will bear hardly on you, Latter, if the King and Parliament should put the country under Prohibition?"

["Drabbet the old cat!" murmured Mr. Latter to himself. "She's fishing to get at my banking account, and a lot she'd interfere if 'twas the workhouse with me to-morrow."]

Aloud he said, rubbing his thumb on the edge of the auger and preparing to make incision upon the cask, "Well, ma'am, I reckon as the Lord will provide mortification enough for us before we're out o' this business, without our troublin' to get in ahead. The way I looks at it is, 'Let's be cheerful.' In my

experience o' life there's no bank like cheerfulness for a man to draw upon, to keep hisself fit and industrious. What's more—if I may say it—'most every staid man, afore he gets to forty, has pretty well come to terms with his innards. He knows—if you'll excuse the figger o' speech, ma'am—what's the pressure 'pon the boiler, an' how to stoke it. There's folks," said Mr. Latter delicately, "as can't stoke hot tea upon sossiges: an' likewise there's folks as'll put forth their best on three goes o' whisky. So why not live an' let live?"

"They say," answered Mrs. Polsue, "that the Czar has been advised to prohibit the sale of vodka throughout his vast dominion."

"What's the beverage, ma'am? I don't seem to know it."

"Vodka."

"Oh, well: very likely he has his reasons. . . . It sounds a long way off."

"But that," Mrs. Polsue persisted, reproducing what she had assimilated from her newspaper,—"*that* is what folks in Polpier cannot be made to understand. At this moment the Germans are nearer than we are to London, as the crow flies; and here are our working classes living on honey and roses, like a City of the Plain. What are our young men thinking about?"

"Why, ma'am," said Mr. Latter, by this time busy with the cask, "they're takin' it slow, I'll own, an' they don't say much. To begin with, 'tis their natur'; an' next, 'tis a bit more they risk than you or me, if I may make bold to say so. Then there's the mothers an' sweethearts pullin' 'em back."

"Tut! If *I* had a sweetheart——"

"Oh, certainly, ma'am!" agreed Mr. Latter. "That

if wars there had been, you'd have driven him to the nearest, I make no doubt at all; though your departed —if I may make so bold—was never the sort to hurt a fly. . . . Though, by God," wound up Mr. Latter in an inaudible murmur as he blew the sawdust from the vent-hole, "the man must have had pluck, too, in his way!"

"There's worse bein' done by Polpier women than holding the men back. *I* call it worse, at any rate, to send your wedded husband off to fight for his country and then pick up with another man for protection."

"Can such goin's-on go on in our midst, ma'am, and nothing about in the shape o' fire and brimstone?"

"I am not retailing gossip, Mr. Latter. I tell you no more than was openly said to me, and brazenly, before witnesses, by one of the parties involved. As one of the Relief Committee appointed to see that none of our reservists' families are suffering want, I called the other day upon Samuel Penhaligon's wife. From the first the woman showed no sense of our respective positions; and after a question or two she became so violent that it drew quite a small crowd around the door. In the midst of her tirading out steps her partner——"

"What? Sam?"

"How should it be Samuel Penhaligon, when you know as well as I do that he's gone to the War? No: the man, I regret to say, was Nicholas Nanjivell."

"Nicky-Nan? . . . Oh, come, ma'am, I say! Why, what capers could *he* been cuttin'?"

"I feel justified in speaking of him as her partner, seeing that he avowed as much. She was living under his protection, he said, and he would see that she didn't

come to want. He had even the effrontery to assure me that he had made an arrangement with Penhaligon. But that, I feel sure, was a shameless lie, and my ears tingle to hear myself repeating it. 'Twas hard enough to keep one's temper with the man standing there and talking big as my lord, when the Almighty knows if for these two years he's seen the colour of a sovereign. . . . Eh? What ails you?" she demanded, as Mr. Latter, who had been testing the point of the auger with his thumb, gave a sudden and violent start.

"Thank' ee, ma'am—there's no blood drawn, as it happens," said Mr. Latter, "but 'twas nibby-jibby,[1] the way you outed with it, and took me of a heap. If you'd ever happened now to stand up to a man and him gettin' his fist full on your wind—no, you *wouldn't* o' course. But 'twas a knock-out. . . . 'Nicky-Nan,' says you, 'an' not a sovereign to bless hisself'—Why the man's fairly *leakin'* sovereigns!—sheddin' 'em about like fish-scales!"

"Mr. Latter—are you *intoxicated?*"

"I wish I was, ma'am. 'Twould be some kind of an explanation, though mebbe not the most satisfactory. . . . When I tell you that the man walked into my bar, three days since, an' scattered soverigns all over my floor! When I tell you he couldn' pull out a han'kerchief to blow his nose but he *sneezed* sovereigns!"

Mrs. Polsue gasped.

"—When I tell you," Mr. Latter pursued, flourishing his auger and rapping it on the flat of his palm, "that one o' these soldiers—a Corporal too, and named Sandercock—was talkin' in my bar not two hours ago, an' says he, 'You've a man called Nanjivell lives

[1] A close shave.

here by the bridge.' 'Ay,' says I. 'Bit of an eccentric?' says he. 'How?' says I. 'The way he drops his gold about,' says the Corporal. 'Ho?' says I, prickin' up my ears, but not choosin' to be talkative with a stranger. 'So folks have been tellin' you that story already?' says I. '*Tellin'* me?' says he. 'Why, I see'd it with my own eyes!' 'Come,' thinks I to myself, 'this fellow's a bra' bit of a liar, wherever he hails from.' 'With my own eyes,' he repeats. 'I see'd 'en drop a sovereign in gold, up by that 'taty-patch of his where the Company's runnin' a trench: an' later on, as I started clearin' his crop, I came on two more in the soil, just where he'd been standin'.' 'Hallo!' thinks I, 'this ben't the same story, but another one altogether.' I didn't say that aloud, though. What I said aloud was, 'You mustn't take notice of everything you see Nicky-Nan do. 'Tis only his tricks.' 'Tricks?' says the Corporal. 'If a man behaved like that down to Penryn we should call 'en an eccentric.' That's the tale, ma'am: an' the best part o' last night, what with puttin' two an' two together an' makin' neither head nor tail of it, I scarce closed an eye in my head."

"I saw the man,"—Mrs. Polsue, after a sharp intake of breath, said it slowly in a hushed tone of surmise. "On Sunday, on my way home from service, I saw him hand the money over. I wasn't near enough to catch all that passed in the way of conversation. But the soldiers were delivering a quantity of potatoes they had dug up in the man's patch, and I concluded that Government, in its wasteful way, was paying him some sort of compensation over and above saving his crop for him. I remember saying to Miss Oliver that somebody ought to write to the War Office about it.

. . . A man that already takes the taxpayers' money for pretending to be a Reservist, and then, when war breaks out, prefers to skulk at home in open sin or next door to it!"

"I wouldn't go so far as all that, ma'am," said Mr. Latter. "In fact, I b'lieve you're under some mistake about Mrs. Penhaligon, who is reckoned as vartuous a woman as any in the parish; while 'tis known that no doctor'd pass Nanjivell for service. But if you ask me, I've a great idea the man has come into a legacy, or else struck a store of gold——"

The landlord checked his tongue abruptly. Some phrase about a 'taty-patch floated across his memory. Had the phrase been his own, or Nicky-Nan's? He must give himself time to think this out, for it might well be the clue. The Corporal had spoken of finding two of the three sovereigns under the soil. . . . While Mr. Latter's brain worked, he cast a quick glance at Mrs. Polsue, in fear that he had gone too far.

But, although she had heard him, it happened that Mrs. Polsue's mind was working on a widely divergent scent. She also was preoccupied with something that haunted her memory: a paragraph in that morning's newspaper. She, too, had no present intention of unveiling her surmise.

"Nonsense!" she said. "Folks don't happen on buried treasure in Polpier; and you can't have a legacy without it getting into the papers."

Mr. Latter had no sooner departed than she put on her bonnet and paid a call on her friend Miss Charity Oliver.

"If Mr. Pamphlett were only a magistrate——" said

Mrs. Polsue, after telling her story. "He was as good as promised it before the Unionists went out of office, as his services to the party well deserved. *This* Government appoints none but its own creatures. . . . And Squire Tresawna living three miles away—with the chance, when you get there, of finding he's not at home——"

"You might send him a letter," suggested Miss Oliver.

"One has to be very careful what one puts down on paper," said Mrs. Polsue. "I don't want to compromise myself unnecessarily, even for the sake of my country. A personal interview is always more advisable . . . But, apart from the distance, I don't fancy the idea of consulting the Squire. He dislikes hearing ill of anybody. Oh, I quite agree!—If he takes that line, he has no business on the Bench. What else is a magistrate *for*?"

"Well, dear, I don't know much about the law. But I've heard it laid down as a rule that every man is supposed to be innocent until you prove that he's guilty——"

"And I never could understand why," Mrs. Polsue interjected; "seeing that five out of every six persons charged are found guilty. To my mind the law would be more sensible if it learnt by experience and took some account of the odds."

"There's a good deal to be said for that, no doubt," Miss Oliver agreed. "But the Squire—or any other magistrate, for that matter—will look on the law as it stands; and if you are going to lay information against Nicholas Nanjivell——"

"Who said I wanted to lay information? Why

should any private person undertake such unpleasantness, when it's the plain duty of the police, and in fact what they're paid for."

"Then why not leave it to Rat-it-all?"

"I believe I will, after giving him a hint. . . . But you don't seem to *see*, Charity Oliver!" her friend exploded. "What you are arguing may do well enough for ordinary times. These are not ordinary times. With all the newspapers declaring that our country is riddled with German spies—positively riddled——"

"I don't believe the man's capable of it, even if he had the will."

"Then, perhaps, if you're so clever, you'll suggest a likelier explanation?"

"He may have won the money in a lottery," Miss Oliver suggested brightly. "One of those Hamburg affairs—if you insist that the money's German."

"I don't insist on anything," snapped Mrs. Polsue. "I only say, first, there's a mystery here, and you can't deny it. Secondly, we're at war,—you'll agree to that, I hope? That being so, it's everybody's business to take precautions and inform the authorities of *anything* that looks suspicious. The more it turns out to be smoke without fire, the more obliged the man ought to be to us for giving him the chance to clear his character."

"Well, I hope you won't start obliging *me* in that way," Miss Oliver was ever slow at following logic. "Because I never put a shilling into a lottery in my life, though I've more than once been in two minds. But in those days Germany always seemed so far off, and their way of counting money in what they call Marks always struck me as so unnatural. Marks was what

you used to get at school—like sherbet and such things."

"Charity Oliver—may the Lord forgive me, but sometimes I'm tempted to think you no better than a fool!"

"The Vicar doesn't think so," responded Miss Oliver complacently. "He called this morning to ask me if I'd add to my public duties by allowing him to nominate me on the Relief Committee, which wants strengthening.

"Did he say *that*?" Mrs. Polsue sat bolt erect.

"Well, I won't swear to the words. . . . Let me see. No, his actual words were that it wanted a little new blood to give it tact. I will say that Mr. Steele has a very happy way of putting things. . . . So you really *are* going to lay information, Mary-Martha? If you see your duty so clear, I can't think why you troubled to consult me."

"I shall do my duty," declared Mrs. Polsue. "Without taking further responsibility, I shall certainly put Rat-it-all on the look-out."

That same evening, a little before sunset, Nicky-Nan took a stroll along the cliff-path towards his devastated holding, to see what progress the military had made with their excavations. The trench, though approaching his boundary fence, had not yet reached it. Somewhat to his surprise he found Mr. Latter there, in the very middle of his patch, examining the turned earth right and left.

"Hallo!" cried Nicky-Nan, unsuspecting. "*You* caught the war-fever too? I never met 'ee so far afield afore. What with your sedentary figure an' the contempt I've heard 'ee use about soldiers——"

Mr. Latter, as he straightened himself up, appeared to be confused. He was also red in the face, and breathed heavily. Nicky-Nan noted, but innocently misread, these symptoms.

"Good friable soil you got here," said Mr. Latter, recovering a measure of self-possession. "Pretty profitable little patch, unless I'm mistaken."

"It was," answered Nicky. "But though, from your habits, you're about the last man I'd have counted on findin' hereabouts, I'm main glad, as it happens. A superstitious person might go so far as to say you'd dropped from heaven."

"Why so?"

Nicky-Nan cast a glance over his shoulder. "We're neighbours here?"

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Latter, puzzled, and on his defence.

"Noticed anything strange about Rat-it-all, of late?"

"Rat-it-all?"

"You wish friendly to him, eh? . . . I ask because as between the police and licensed victuallers——" Nicky-Nan hesitated.

"You may make your mind easy," Mr. Latter assured him. "Rat-it-all wouldn't look over a blind. I've no complaint to make of Rat-it-all, and never had. But what's happened to him?"

"I wish I knew," answered Nicky-Nan. "I glimpsed him followin' me, back along the path; an' when I turned about for a chat, he dodged behind a furze-bush like as if he was pouncin' on some valuable butterfly. 'That's odd,' I thought: for I'd never heard of his collectin' such things. But he's often told me how lonely a constable feels, an' I thought he might have

picked up wi' the habit to amuse himself. So on I walked, waitin' for him to catch me up; an' by-an'-by turned about to look for 'en. There he was, on the path, an' be damned if he didn' dodge behind another bush! I wonder if 'tis sunstroke? It always seemed to me those helmets must be a tryin' wear."

"I dunno. . . . But here he is! Let's ask him," said Mr. Latter as Policeman Rat-it-all appeared on the ridge with body bent and using the gait of a sleuth-hound Indian. [There is no such thing as a sleuth-hound Indian, but none the less Rat-it-all was copying him.]

"Hallo, Rat-it-all!"

The constable straightened himself up and approached with an affected air of jauntiness.

"Why, whoever would ha' thought to happen on *you* two here?" he exclaimed, and laughed uneasily.

"Sure enough the man's manner isn't natural," said Mr. Latter to Nicky-Nan. "Speakin' as a publican, too," he confided, "I'd be sorry if anything happened to the chap an' we got a stranger in his place."

"What's the matter with 'ee, Rat-it-all?" asked Nicky-Nan sympathetically. "By the way you've been behavin' all up the hill——"

"You noticed it?"

"*Noticed* it!"

"Rat it all!—I mean, I was hopin' you wouldn't. I begin to see as it will take more practice than I allowed." He cast a glance back at the ridge as he seated himself on the turf. "Either of you got a pinch o' baccy?"

"Then you *aren't* afflicted in any way?" exclaimed Nicky-Nan with relief. "But what was the matter

with 'ee, just now, that you kept behavin' so comical?"

"Got such a thing as a match? . . . Well, I didn' believe it from the first. You must make allowance," said he as he puffed, "that a constable has communications in these times of a certain nature, calculated to get on his nerves. For my part, I hate all this mistrustfulness that's goin'. 'Confidence'—that's my motto—'as betwix' man an' man.'"

CHAPTER XX

MISS OLIVER PROFFERS ASSISTANCE

ALTHOUGH this narrative has faintly attempted to trace it here and there in operation, no one can keep tally with rumour in Polpier, or render any convincing account of its secret ways. It were far easier to hunt thistledown.

The Penhaligon family were packing, preparing for the great move into Aun' Bunney's derelict cottage. 'Bert and 'Beida had been given to understand—had made sure in fact—that the move would be made, at earliest, in the week before Michaelmas Day. For some reason or other Mrs. Penhaligon had changed her mind, and was hurrying things forward almost feverishly. 'Beida—who for a year or so had been taken more and more into her mother's confidence—suddenly found herself up against a dead wall of mystery and obstinacy. The growing girl was puzzled—driven to consult 'Bert about it; and a Polpier woman is driven far before she seeks advice from husband or brother.

She might have spared herself the humiliation, too. For 'Bert, when she cornered him, gave no help at all. Yet he was positive enough. [It takes some experience to discover what painted laths men are.]

"Some woman's rot!" decided 'Bert with a shrug of his shoulders. "Father bein' away, she's worryin', an' wants to get it over. She don't consult me, so I've no call to tell her to take things cooler." The trumpet,

after thus uttering no uncertain sound, tailed off upon the word 'females.'

"Get along with your 'females';" fired up 'Beida, springing to arms for her sex. "I'd like to know where the world'd be without us. But don't you see that 'tisn' *like* Mother to be so daggin' to quit the old house?"

"She wants to get the grievin' over, I tell you," 'Bert maintained.

As for 'Biades, he was rather more—certainly not less—of a nuisance than children of his age usually are when a family intends a move. He asked a thousand questions, wandered among packing-cases as in a maze, and, if his presence were forgotten for a moment, sat down and howled. On being picked up and righted he would account for his emotion quite absurdly yet lucidly and in a way that wrung all hearts.

On the second day of packing he looked out from a zareba of furniture under which he had contrived to crawl, and demanded—

"What's a Spy?"

"A Spy?" his mother echoed after he had repeated the question three or four times. "A Spy is a wicked man: worse nor a Prooshian."

"What's a Prooshian?"

"A Prooshian," said Mrs. Penhaligon, inverting one bedroom chair on another, "is a kind o' German, and by all accounts the p'isonest. A Spy is worse nor even a Prooshian, because he pretends he isn't till he've wormed hisself into your confidence, an' then he comes out in his true colours, an' the next thing you know you're stabbed in the back in the dark." Mrs. Penhaligon might miss to be lucid in explanation, but never to be vivid.

"What's your 'confidence'?" asked 'Biades, after a digestive pause.

His sister 'Beida turned about while she bumped herself up and down in a sitting posture on the lid of an old sea-chest overfilled with pillows, bed-curtains, and other "soft goods."

"It isn't your stummick, on which you're crawlin' at this moment like Satan in the garden. And only yesterday your askin' to be put into weskits on the ground of your age! A nice business 'twould be to keep *your* front in buttons!" While admonishing 'Biades, 'Beida continued to bump herself on the sea-chest, her speech by consequence coming in short interrupted gushes like water from a pump. "A Spy," she continued, "is a man what creeps in a person's belongings same as you're doin' at this moment, an' then goes off an' gets paid for writin' to Germany about it: which if we didn' know from bitter experience as you couldn't spell a, b, 'ab,' we should be feelin' nervous at this moment, the way you're behavin'."

"How can you tell a Spy?" persisted 'Biades after another pause, ignoring reproof. "Does he go about with a gamey leg, like Mr. Nanjivell? Or what?"

"Don't you set up to laugh at gamey legs or any such infirmity," his mother warned him, "when there's an All-seein' Eye about; an', for all we know, around the corner at this moment gettin' ready to strike you comical."

"There's no way to tell a Spy at first," added 'Beida; "an' that's why they're so dangerous. The usual way is that first you have your suspicions, an' then, some day when he's not lookin', you search his premises an' the fat's in the fire."

"What's an infirmity?" asked 'Biades. Getting no answer, after half a minute he asked, "What's premises?'

Still there was no answer. With a sigh he wriggled backwards out of his shelter. Seizing the moment when his sister had at length pressed down the lid and his mother was kneeling to lock it, he slipped out of the room and betook himself to the water-side, where he fell into deep thought.

This happened on Tuesday. During Wednesday and the morning of Thursday the child was extraordinarily well-behaved. As Mrs. Penhaligon observed to her daughter—

"You kept warnin' me he'd be a handful, messin' about an' unpackin' things as soon as they was packed. Whereas if he'd been his own father, he couldn' ha' been more considerate in keepin' out o' the way. 'Tis wonderful how their tender intellec's turn steady when there's trouble in the family."

"But there isn't."

"Well, you know what I mean. For the last two days the blessed child might not ha' been in existence, he's such a comfort."

"Well," said 'Beida, "you *may* be right. But I never yet knowed 'Biades quiet for half this time 'ithout there was somebody's bill to pay at the end o't."

That same afternoon as Miss Charity Oliver came down the hill on her first errand as Relief Visitor, at the corner by Mrs. Pengelly's she happened on young 'Biades, posted solitary before the shop-window. There was something queer in this: for the elder children had started a game of tig, down by the bridge—that is

to say, within earshot—and as a rule any such game attracted 'Biades fatally to its periphery, where he would stand with his eyes rounded and his heart sick for the time when he would be grown up and invited to join in. To-day his back was turned to the fun.

Miss Oliver, however, knew no more of 'Biades' ways than that on her approach as a rule he either fled precipitately or, if no retreat offered itself, stood stock-still, put a finger in his mouth, and seemed to be calling on some effort of the will to make him invisible. To-day he met her accost easily, familiarly, even with what in a grown male might have been taken for a drunken leer.

"Well, my little man!" said Miss Oliver. "And what might you be doing here, all by yourself?"

"Choosin'," answered 'Biades. Reluctantly he withdrew his eyes again from gloating on Mrs. Pengelly's miscellaneous exhibits. "I 'spect it'll end in peppermint lumps, but I'd rather have trousers if a whole penny would run to 'em."

He held out his palm, exhibiting a coin over which his fingers quickly closed again.

"What's that money you have?" asked Miss Oliver sharply.

"A penny," answered the child. "A whole penny. I like peppermint lumps, but they smell so strong in your breath that 'Bert and 'Beida would find out an' want to share. Of course trousers are found out quite as easy, or easier. But you can't go shares in trousers: not," added 'Biades thoughtfully, "if you try ever so."

"May I see the pretty penny?" coaxed Miss Oliver: for in the glimpse allowed her it had seemed an extraordinarily bright and yellow one.

"You mustn' come no nearer than you are now,"

said 'Biades, backing a little. After an inward struggle he opened his fingers and disclosed the coin.

"Where did you get *that*?" Miss Oliver's eyes were notoriously sharp. Her voice rapped out the question in a way that made 'Biades blink and clasp the coin again as he cast a desperate look behind him in search of retreat.

"Mr. Nanjivell gave it to me."

"Mr. Nanjivell! . . . He couldn't!" Miss Oliver took a step forward. 'Biades lowered his head.

"If you come a step closer I'll butt 'ee!" he threatened. "Mr. Nanjivell gave it to me," he repeated, and, seeing her taken aback, soared upon the wing of falsehood. "Mother's changing houses, an' Mr. Nanjivell said I'd behaved so quiet I deserved a penny if ever a boy did in this world."

"A penny?" Miss Oliver echoed. "But where did he—how did he come across that kind of penny? Such a bright penny, I mean."

"He spat upon it, an' rubbed it on his trousers," answered 'Biades with a glibness that astonished himself, 'peeking' between his fingers to make sure that they really held the prize. Inspiration took the child, once started, and he lied as one lifted far above earth. "Mr. Nanjivell said as it might help me to forget Father's bein' away at the War. Mr. Nanjivell said as I couldn' learn too early to lay by against a rainy day, and I was to take it to Missis Pengelly's and if it took the form of trousers he didn' mind. Mother wanted me to put it in the savings bank, but he wouldn' hear of it. He said they weren't to be trusted any longer—not savings banks. He said——"

"But where did *he* get it?"

'Biades blinked, and set his face hardily. He had the haziest notions of how money was acquired. But from infancy he had perforce attended chapel.

"He took up a collection."

"*What?*"

"He took up a collection, Miss: the same as Mr. Pamphlett does on Sunday. Back-along, when he was at sea——"

"Alcibiades," said Miss Oliver on a sudden impulse, feeling for her purse. "What would you say if I gave you two pennies for your bright new one? Two pennies will buy twice as much as one, you know."

"O' course I know *that*," said 'Biades cunningly. "But what for?"

"Because you have told me such a pretty story."

'Biades hesitated. He had been driven—in self-defence, to be sure—into saying things at the bare thought of which he felt a premonitory tingling in the rearward part of his person. But somehow the feel of the coin in his hand seemed to enfranchise him. He had at once a sense of manly solidity, and of having been floated off into a giddy atmosphere in which nothing succeeded like success and the law of gravity had lost all spanking weight. He backed towards Mrs. Pengelly's shop door, greedy, suspicious, irresolute.

Miss Oliver produced two copper coins, and laid them in his palm. As the exchange was made he backed upon Mrs. Pengelly's shop door, and the impact set a bell clanging. The sense of it shot up his spine of a sudden, and at each stroke of the clapper he felt he had sold his soul to the devil. But Miss Oliver stood in front of him, with a smile on her face that seemed to waver the more she fixed it: and at this moment

the voice of Mrs. Pengelly — a deep contralto — called—

"Come in!"

Some women are comfortable, others uncomfortable. In the language of Polpier, "there be bitter and there be bowerly," Mrs. Pengelly was a bowerly woman, and traded in lollipops. Miss Oliver——

Anyhow, the child 'Biades turned and took refuge in the shop, hurling back the door-flap and its clanging bell.

This left Miss Oliver without, in the awkwardest of situations: since she had a conscience as well as curiosity. In her palm lay a guinea-piece: which meant that (at the very least, on the current rate of exchange) she had swindled a child out of twenty shillings and tenpence. This would never do, of course. . . . Yet she could not very well follow in at this moment and explain to Mrs. Pengelly.

Moreover, here was a mystery connected with Nanjivell. In the midst of her embarrassment she felt a secret assurance that she was in luck; that she held a clue; that she had in her grasp something to open Mrs. Polsue's eyes in envy.

"The first thing," she decided, "is to take this piece of gold to the child's mother, and instanter."

But, as fate would have it, she had scarcely reached the porch of the Old Doctor's house when Nicky-Nan himself emerged from it: and at the sight of him her fatal curiosity triumphed.

"Mr. Nanjivell!" she called.

Nicky-Nan turned about. "Good mornin', Miss. Was that you a-callin'?"

Having yielded to her impulse, Miss Oliver suddenly

found herself at a loss how to proceed. Confusion and the call to improvise an opening movement mantled her cheeks with that crimson tint which her friend Mary-Martha so often alleged to be unbecoming.

"I stopped you," she answered, stammering a little, "because, with all our little differences in Polpier, we're all one family in a sense, are we not? We have a sort of fellow-feeling—eh?—whether in trouble *or* prosperity. And as a Polpier woman, born and bred, I'd like to be one of the first to wish you joy of your good fortune."

Nicky-Nan's face did not flush. On the contrary, it turned to an ashen grey, as he stood before her and leant for support on his stick. He was making inarticulate sounds in his throat.

"Who told you?" he gasped hoarsely. Recollecting himself, he hastily changed the form of the question. "What lies have they been tellin' up about me now?"

Miss Oliver had meant to disclose the guinea in her palm, and tell him of her meeting with the child 'Biades. But now she clutched the coin closer, and it gave her confidence—a feeling that she held her trump card in reserve.

"Why, of course, they have been putting up lies, as you say," she answered cunningly. "There was never such a place as Polpier for tittle-tattle. They've even gone so far as to set it about that it came from Germany: which was the reason you haven't joined up with the colours."

"*What* came from Germany?"

"And of course it is partly your own fault, isn't it? —if you *will* make such a secret of the thing? . . . Yet, I'm sure I don't blame you. Living the solitary

life you do must make it specially trying to feel that everyone is canvassing your affairs. For my part, I said, 'If it *does* come from Germany,' I said, 'you may be sure 'tis through one of those lotteries.'" On a swift thought she added, "But that tale is all nonsense, of course: because the Germans wouldn't pay in guineas, would they?"

"'Guineas'?" repeated Nicky-Nan, as the solid earth seemed to fail beneath his feet and his supporting stick.

Miss Oliver, grasping the advantage of his evident distress, decided in a flash (1) that here, before her, stood the wreck of a well-connected man, cleanly in person, not ill to look upon; and (2) that she would a little longer withhold disclosure of the guinea.

"Well, I *heard* it took the form of guineas, Mr. Nanjivell. But of course I don't wish to be inquisitive."

"That devil Pamphlett has been talkin'," muttered Nicky-Nan to himself.

"I only suggest," Miss Oliver went on, "that if 'twas known—I don't seek to know the amount: but if I had your authority to say that 'twas all in good coin of this realm—with my opportunities I might hush up half this silly talk about your being a spy and in German pay——"

"What? . . . ME, a German spy?" The words seemed fairly to strangle him.

"It's a positive fact, I assure you. I mean it's a positive fact *somebody* has been putting that story about."

"If I knawed the critter, male or female——" Nicky-Nan gripped his stick.

Miss Oliver could not help admiring his demeanour, his manly indignation. The man had fine features, too—a touch of ancestry. She grew bolder.

"Well, I rather think I *do* know the creature, as you put it—though I am not going to tell you," she added almost archly. Then, of a sudden, "Has Constable Rat-it-all been paying you any attention lately?"

"Well . . . I'll be danged!"

Miss Oliver laughed pleasantly. "The fact is, Mr. Nanjivell, you want a woman's wit to warn you, as every man does in your position. And just now it took me of a sudden, happening upon you in this way and knowing how you were surrounded by evil tongues, that I'd cast prudence to the winds and speak to you openly for your good, as a neighbour. You don't think the worse of me, I hope?"

"Why, no, Miss Oliver. Contrariwise I ought to be—if you hadn' taken me so sudden!" he concluded lamely.

"We'll say no more about that. All I suggest is that, until you find someone worthier of your confidence, if you care to count on me as an old friend and neighbour——"

"Good Lord!" Nicky-Nan cast a hand to his brow. "You'll excuse my manners, Miss—but if you'll let me go off an' think it over——"

He turned as if to flee into the house. Then, as if headed off by the noise of hammering within, he faced about and made across the bridge for the quay-head and his favourite bollard. There, as a man in a dream, he found a seat, and vainly for ten minutes strove to collect and arrange his thoughts. Suspicion, fear, wild anger wove dances in his brain—witch-dances immingled with cursings upon the heads of Pamphlett and Policeman Rat-it-all. . . . Of a sudden he sat up and stiffened with a new fright.

"By the manner of her conversation, that woman was makin' love to me!"

Left to herself, and as Nicky-Nan passed out of sight around the corner beyond the bridge, Miss Charity Oliver warily opened her palm and examined the guinea.

"By rights," she mused, "I ought to take this in to Mrs. Penhaligon at once, and caution her about Alcibiades. . . . No, I won't, though. I'll call first and have it out with Mary-Martha. She thinks she knows everything, and she has a way of making others believe it. But she has proved herself a broken reed over this affair: and," said Miss Oliver to herself with decision, "I rather fancy I'll make Mary-Martha sensible of it."

CHAPTER XXI

FAIRY GOLD

"So you see, Mary-Martha, that for once in a way you were wrong and I was right."

"You're too fond of sweepin' statements, Charity Oliver. I doubt your first, and your second I not only doubt but deny. So far as I remember, I said the man was probably in German pay, while you insisted that he'd won the money in a lottery."

"I didn't insist: I merely suggested. It was you who started to talk about German money: and I answered you that, even if the money *was* German, there might be an innocent way of explaining it before you took upon yourself to warn the police."

Mrs. Polsue glanced at her friend sharply. "You seem to be gettin' very hot over it," was her comment. "Why, I can't think. You certainly wouldn't if you gave any thought to your appearance."

"I'm not hot in the least," hotly protested Miss Oliver. "I'm simply proving to you that you've made a mistake: which you could never in your life bear to be told. The money is English gold, with King George the Something's head on it: and *that* you can't deny, try as you may."

"All the more reason why it shouldn't come through a German lottery," replied Mrs. Polsue, examining the coin.

"I tell you for the last time that I only threw lotteries

out as a suggestion. There's many ways to come into a fortune besides lotteries. You can have it left to you by will, for instance——"

"Dear, dear! . . . But never mind: go on. How one lives and learns!"

"And the other day the papers were full of a man who came into tens of thousands through what they call a Derby sweep. I remember wondering how cleaning chimneys—even those long factory ones—could be so profitable in the north of England, until it turned out that a sweep was some kind of horse-race."

"The Derby, as it is called," said Mrs. Polsue, imparting information in her turn, "is the most famous of horse-races, and the most popular, though not the most fashionable. It is called the Blue Ribbon of the Turf."

"Indeed? Now that's very gratifying to hear," said Miss Oliver. "I didn't know they ran *any* of these meetings on teetotal lines."

"As I was saying," her friend continued, "the gowns worn are not so expensive as at Ascot, and I believe there is no Royal Enclosure. But the Derby is nevertheless what they call a National Institution. As you know, I disapprove of horse-racing as a pastime: but my brother-in-law in the Civil Service used to attend it regularly, from a sense of duty, with a green veil around his hat."

"I suppose he didn't want to be recognised?" Miss Oliver hazarded.

"He didn't go so far as to say that Government Officials were compelled to attend: though he implied that it was expected of him. There's an unwritten law in most of these matters. . . . But after what

I've told you, Charity Oliver, do you look me in the face and suggest that the Derby horse-race—being run, as everyone knows, early in the London season and somewhere towards the end of May, if my memory serves me—can be made to account for a man like Nanjivell, that humanly speaking shouldn't know one end of a horse from another, starting to parade his wealth in the month of August?"

"You've such a knack of taking me up before I'm down, Mary-Martha! I never said nor implied that Mr. Nanjivell had won his money on a horse-race. I only said that some people did."

"Oh, well, if *that's* your piece of news," said Mrs. Polsue with her finest satirical air, "it was considerate of you to put on your bonnet and lose no time in telling me. . . . But how long is it since we started 'Mister'-ing Nanjivell in this way?"

Miss Oliver's face grew crimson. "It seems to me that now he has come into money—and being always of good family, as everybody knows——" She hesitated and came to a halt. Her friend's eyes were fixed on her, and with an expression not unlike a lazy cat's.

"Oho!" thought Mrs. Polsue to herself, and for just a moment her frame shook with a dry inward spasm; but not a muscle of her face twitched. Aloud she said: "Well, in your place I shouldn't be so hot, at short notice, to stand up for a man who on your own showing is a corrupter of children's minds. Knowing what I've told you of the relations between this Nanjivell and Mrs. Penhaligon, and catching this Penhaligon child with a gold coin in his hand, and hearing from his own confession that the man gave it to him, even *you* might have drawn some conclusion, I'd have thought."

"I declare, Mary-Martha, I wouldn't think so uncharitably of folks as you do, not if I was paid for it. You're annoyed — that's what you are — because you got Mr.—— because you got Nanjivell watched for a German spy, and now I've proved you're wrong and you can't wriggle out of *that*!"

"Your godfather and godmothers did very well for you at your baptism, Charity Oliver. Prophets they must have been. . . . But just you take a chair and compose yourself and listen to me. A minute ago you complained that I took you up before you were down. Well, I'll improve on that by taking you down before you're up—or up so far as you think yourself. Answer me. This is a piece of gold, eh?"

"Why, of course. That's why I brought it to you."

"What kind of a piece of gold?"

"A guinea-piece. My father used to wear one on his watch-chain, and I recognised the likeness at once."

"Quite so. Now when your father happened to earn a sovereign, did he go and hang it on his watch-chain?"

"What a silly question!"

"It isn't at all a silly question. . . . Tell me how many sovereigns you've seen in your life, and how many guineas?"

"O-oh! . . . I think I see what you mean——"

"I congratulate you, I'm sure! Now, I won't swear, but I'm morally certain that guineas haven't been what they call in circulation for years and years and years."

"You're always seeing them in subscription lists," Miss Oliver objected. "Take our Emergency Fund —'Charles Pendarves Tresawna, Esq., J.P., twenty-five guineas.'"

"I seem to remember that the Squire paid by cheque," said Mrs. Polsue dryly.

"But the guineas must have been there, in the Bank. . . . Oh, I see! You mean that a guinea being worth twenty-one shillings——"

"That's right: you're getting at it. Though I declare, Charity Oliver, there are times when I don't know which is furthest behind the times—your head, or the coquelicots you insist on wearing upon it. But now I hope you'll admit I was right, and there's a mystery about Nanjivell. Whether 'tis mixed up with his immorality or separate I won't pretend to decide, or not at this stage."

"But anyway you can't make out a guinea-piece to be German," maintained Miss Oliver with a last show of obstinacy.

"I don't say 'yes' or 'no' to that just yet," Mrs. Polsue replied. "The newspapers tell us the Germans have been hoarding gold for a very long time. But you mentioned the Bank a moment ago—or did I? Never mind: it was a good suggestion anyway. Wait while I send across for Mr. Pamphlett."

"Why, to be sure," said Mr. Pamphlett, "it's a guinea—a George the Second guinea." He pushed back a corner of the cloth and rang the coin on the table. "Sound . . . and not clipped at all. There's always its intrinsic value, as we say: and one of these days it will have an additional value as a curiosity. But as yet that is almost negligible. Oddly enough——" He broke off, fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a guinea almost precisely similar. Miss Oliver gasped: it was so like a conjuring trick.

"Where did Miss Oliver get this one?" asked Mr. Pamphlett, laying his right forefinger upon the guinea on the table while still holding the other displayed in the palm of his left hand.

"I got it," confessed Miss Oliver, "off that youngest child of Samuel Penhaligon's, who told me it had been given him as a present by Mr.—by Nicholas Nanjivell."

"WHAT?"

She blanched, as Mr. Pamphlett stared at her. "His eyes," as she explained later, "were round in his head—round as gooseberries."

"Well, I suppose I oughtn't to have taken it from the child. . . . But seeing that he didn't know its value, and there being something of a mystery in the whole business—as Mary-Martha here will explain, though she will have it that the man is a German spy——"

"Stuff and nonsense, ma'am! . . . I beg your pardon: you're quite right: there *is* a mystery here, though it has nothing to do with German spies. I rather fancy I'm in a position to get to the bottom of it."

On Saturday, almost at blink of dawn, the Penhaligons started house-moving. Mrs. Penhaligon had everything ready—even the last box corded—more than thirty-six hours earlier. But she would neither finish nor start installing herself on a Friday, which was an unlucky day.

The discomfort of taking their meals on packing-cases and sleeping on mattresses spread upon the bare floor weighed as nothing with the children in comparison with the delightful sense of adventure. Neither 'Bert

nor 'Beida, when they came to talk it over, could understand why their mother was in such a fever to quit the old house. Scarcely ten days before she had kept assuring them, almost angrily, that there was no hurry before Michaelmas. It was queer, too, that not only had she forbidden them to accept even the smallest offer of help from Nicky-Nan when he showed himself willing (as he expressed it) for any light job as between neighbours, but on 'Bert's attempting to argue the point with her she had boxed 'Biades' ears for a quite trifling offence and promptly collapsed and burst into tears with no more preparation than that of throwing an apron over her head.

"She's upset," said 'Bert.

"If you learn at this rate, you'll be sent for, one of these days, by the people up at Scotland Yard," said 'Beida sarcastically. But you cannot glean much intelligence from a face which is covered by an apron.

"She's upset at leavin' the house. Women are like that—always—when it comes to the point," 'Bert persisted.

"Are they? I'll give you leave to watch *me*. And I'll bet you sixpence."

"You're not a woman yet. When the time comes you may start cryin' or you mayn't. But I'll take even money you box 'Biades' ears."

'Beida's glance travelled to that forlorn child. "I'll not take any bet," she announced; "when you know that it may be necessary at any moment—he's that unaccountable." She lifted her voice so that the innocent culprit could not avoid hearing. "I don't speckilate on a *thief*," she added with vicious intention.

"Hush—hush!" said 'Bert, and glanced anxiously at his sobbing parent.

Nicky-Nan was the worst puzzled of them all. He had promised Sam Penhaligon to do his best when the family shifted quarters: and now Mrs. Penhaligon would not hear of his lifting so much as a hand.

He spent most of the day out on the cliffs, idly watching the military.

Mrs. Penhaligon had invoked the aid of Farmer Best; and Farmer Best (always a friend of the unfriended) had sent down two hay waggons to transport the household stuff. By four in the afternoon, or thereabouts, the last load had been carried and was in process of delivery at Aunt Bunney's cottage.

At a quarter to five Nicky-Nan returned to the desolate house. The front door stood open, of course. So (somewhat to his surprise) did the door of the Penhaligons' kitchen.

"They're all behindhand," thought Nicky-Nan. "Better fit the good woman hadn' been so forward to despise my helpin'."

He peered in cautiously. The room was uninhabited; stark bare of furniture, save for the quadrant key left to hang from the midmost beam; the "hellen"-slated floor clean as a new pin.

Nicky-Nan heaved a sigh. "So they've gone," he thought to himself; "an' so we all pass out, one after another. A decent, cleanly woman, with all her kinks o' temper. Much like my own mother, as I remember her."

He passed into his parlour, laid down hat and walking-staff, and of a sudden pulled himself upright, rigid.

Footsteps were treading the floor overhead.

For a moment it shook him almost to faintness. Then, swiftly, wrath came to his aid, and snatching up his staff again he stumped out to the foot of the stairway.

"Who's that, up there?"

"Ha! . . . Is that you, Nanjivell," answered the voice of Mr. Pamphlett. "A domiciliary visit, and no harm intended." The figure of Mr. Pamphlett blocked the head of the landing.

Nicky-Nan raised his stick and shook it in a fury.

"You get out within this minute, or I'll have the law of 'ee."

"Gently, my friend," responded Mr. Pamphlett soothingly. "I have the Constable here with me, besides Mr. Gilbert the builder. And here's my Ejectment Order, if you drive me to it."

"When you promised me——" stammered Nicky-Nan, escalading the stairs and holding his staff before him as if storming a breach.

"But,"—Mr. Pamphlett waved a hand—"we need not talk about ejectment orders. By the terms of your lease, if you will examine them, the landlord is entitled to examine his premises at any reasonable hour. You won't deny this to be a reasonable hour. . . . Well, Constable? What about that cupboard?"

Nicky-Nan, reaching the doorway, gave a gasp. Across the room Rat-it-all, on hands and knees, had pulled open the door of the fatal cupboard, and had thrust in head and shoulders, exploring.

"There's a loose piece of flooring here, Mr. Pamphlett. New, by the looks of it."

There was a sound of boards being shaken and thrown together in a heap.

"Queer old cache here below. . . . Steady, now . . . wait till I turn my bull's-eye on it! Lucky I brought the lantern, too!"

"You dare!" screamed Nicky-Nan, rushing to pull him backward by the collar.

The constable, his head in the bowels of the hiding-place, neither heard him nor saw Mr. Pamphlett and Builder Gilbert interpose to hold Nicky-Nan back.

"But 'tis empty," announced Policeman Rat-it-all.

"Empty?"

EMPTY?

Nicky-Nan, bursting from the two men, gripped Rat-it-all by the collar, flung him back on the floor, snatched his bull's-eye, and diving as a rabbit into its burrow, plunged the lantern's ray into the gulf.

Rat-it-all had spoken truth. The treasure—every coin of it—had vanished!

Nicky-Nan's head dropped sideways and rattled on the boards.

CHAPTER XXII

SALVAGE

"MISTER NANJIVELL! Mister Nanjivell!"

It was the child 'Beida's voice, calling from below.

"Are you upstairs, Mister Nanjivell? I want to see you—in *such* a hurry!"

Following up her summons, she arrived panting at the open doorway. "O-oh!" she cried, after a catch of the breath. Her face blanched as she looked around the bedroom; at Builder Gilbert, standing, wash-jug in hand; at Mr. Pamphlett, kneeling, examining the cupboard; at Policeman Rat-it-all, kneeling also, but on one knee, while on the other he supported Nicky-Nan's inert head and bathed a cut on the right temple, dipping a rag of a towel into the poor chipped basin on the ground beside him.

"What are you doin' to him?" demanded 'Beida, her colour coming back with a rush.

Mr. Pamphlett had slewed about on his knees. "Here, you cut and run!" he commanded sharply. But his posture did not lend itself to authority, and he showed some embarrassment.

"What are you doin' to him?" the child demanded again.

"He've had a fit," explained Builder Gilbert, holding out the ewer. "Here, run downstairs and fetch up some more water, if you want to be useful."

'Beida stared at the ewer. She transferred her gaze to Rat-it-all and his patient: then, after a shiver, to

Mr. Pamphlett. She had courage. Her eyes grew hard and fierce.

"Is that why Mr. Pamphlett's pokin' his nose into a cupboard?"

"Rat-it-all!" the constable ejaculated, casting a glance over his shoulder and dipping a hand wide of the basin.

"Fetch up some water, my dear," suggested Builder Gilbert. "When a man's in a fit 'tis no time to ask questions, as you'll learn when you grow up." Again he proffered the ewer.

'Beida ignored it. "When a man's in a fit, do folks help by pokin' their noses into his cupboards?" she demanded again, not removing her eyes from Mr. Pamphlett.

"Pack that child out!" commanded Mr. Pamphlett, standing up and addressing Rat-it-all. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear, sir," answered Rat-it-all. "But situated as I be——" He cast a helpless glance at the child, who seemed to grow in stature as, lifting her forefinger and pointing it at Mr. Pamphlett, she advanced into the room and shrilled:

"You've come to steal his money, the three of 'ee! An' you can't take me in nor frighten me, not one of 'ee!"

The high treble voice, or the word "money," or both, fetched Nicky-Nan back to consciousness. He opened his eyes and groaned.

"The money—where's the money?" he muttered. His eyes opened wider. Then of a sudden his brain cleared. He sat up with a wild cry, almost a scream; and, thrusting Rat-it-all backwards with all the force

of one hand, with the other groped on the floor for his walking-staff—which lay, however, a couple of yards from him and close by Mr. Pamphlett's feet.

"My money!—Rogues! Cheats!——" He broke down and put a hand to his head in momentary faintness. "Where be I?" Then taking his hand away and catching sight of the blood on it, he yelled out "Murder! Where's my money? Murder! Thieves!"

"Hush 'ee, Mister Nanjivell!" 'Beida dropped on her knees beside him. "Hush 'ee now, co! Here, let *me* take the towel an' bathe your poor head," she coaxed him. "You've had a fall, an' cut yourself—that's what happened. An' these men weren't murderin' 'ee, nor shan't while I am here. No, nor they han't stole your money, neither—though I won't say they weren't tryin'."

He submitted, after a feeble convulsive struggle. "Where's my money?" he persisted.

"Your money's all right. Safe as if 'twas in the Bank—safer, I reckon," she added, with an unfriendly glance at Mr. Pamphlett.

"What money is this you're talking about?" asked that gentleman, stepping forward. He had no children of his own: and when he spoke to children (which was not often) his tone conveyed that he thought very little of them. He used that tone now: which was sheer blundering folly: and he met his match.

"The money you were huntin' for," answered 'Beida, quick as thought.

"You mustn't speak to me like that. It's naughty and—er—unbecoming."

"Why? *Weren't* you lookin' for it?" Her eyes sought Rat-it-all and questioned him.

Mr. Pamphlett made haste before his ally could speak. "The Policeman was acting in the execution of his duty." This was a fine phrase, and it took 'Beida aback, for she had not a notion what it meant. But while she sought for a retort, Mr. Pamphlett followed up his advantage, to crush her, and blundered again. "You don't understand that, eh?"

"Not rightly," she admitted.

"Then don't you see how foolish it is for little girls to mix themselves in grown-up people's affairs? A policeman has to do many things in what is called the execution of his duty. For instance," continued Mr. Pamphlett impressively, "sometimes he takes little girls when they're naughty, and locks them up."

"Fiddlestick!" said 'Beida with a sigh of relief. "Now I know you're gassin'. . . . Just now you frightened me with your talk of executions, which is what they do to a man when he's murdered some person: and o' course if Nicky—if Mr. Nanjivell had been doin' anything o' *that* sort—which he hasn', o' course. . . . But when you go on pretendin' as Rat-it-all can lock *me* up, why then I see your game. Tryin' to frighten me, you are, because I'm small."

"If you were a child of mine," threatened Mr. Pamphlett, very red in the gills, "do you know what I'd do to you?"

"No," replied 'Beida; "I can't think. . . . But I reckon 'twould be something pretty mean. Oh, I'm sick an' tired of the gentry!—if you call yourself gentry. First of all you turn Father an' Mother out to find a new home. An' then, as if that wasn' enough, you must come nosin' in after Mr. Nanjivell's small savin's. . . . Gentry!" She swung round upon Builder Gilbert.

"Here, Mr. Gilbert, you're neither gentry nor perlice. When I tell you about Miss Charity Oliver, that calls herself a lady! What must *she* do but, happenin' on 'Biades—that's my younger brother, an' scarce turned four—outside o' Mrs. Pengelly's, with a bit of gold money in his hand that Mr. Nanjivell gave to him in a moment o' weakness,—what must she do (an' callin' herself a lady, no doubt, all the while) but palm off two bright coppers on him for a swap? . . . That's a *fact*," 'Beida wound up, dabbing the towel gently, but with an appearance of force, against Nicky-Nan's temple, "for I got it out o' the child's own mouth, an' work enough it was. That's your gentry!"

"Hey?" Nicky-Nan pushed her hand aside. "What's this you're tellin', now?"

"Ask *him*!" she answered, nodding towards Mr. Pamphlett. "He knows all about it, an' 'tis no use for him to pretend he don't."

"*Me* give your small brother——?" began Nicky, but broke off with a groan and felt his brow again. "Oh, where's the head or tail to this? Where's the *sense?* . . . Give me my money—that's all I ask. Stop talkin' all of 'ee, an' fetch me what you've stole, between 'ee, an' leave me alone!"

Mr. Pamphlett shifted his ground. "You're right, Nanjivell. What's become of your money?—that's the main point, eh?"

"O' course 'tis the main point," growled Nicky. "Though I'm damned if I see how it consarns *you*."

"Maybe I can enlighten you by and by. For the present you want to know what has become of the money: and I've a strong suspicion this child can tell us, if she chooses to confess. If not—" he raised a

minatory forefinger and shook it at 'Beida—"well, it's fortunate I brought the constable, who will know how to act."

"Will I?" said Rat-it-all, scratching his head.

"No, you won't," 'Beida answered him stoutly, and turned again to Nicky-Nan.

"Mr. Nanjivell," she pleaded, "tell me—didn't you find these three turnin' your room inside out?"

"'Course I did." Nicky-Nan cast a malignant glance around.

"Was they doin' it with your leave?"

"Course they wasn't. Why, look at the state o' my head!"

"You cut it yourself, fallin' against the scurtin'-board by the cupboard," put in Builder Gilbert.

'Beida noted his nervousness.

"You say so!" she rapped on him. "Maybe when Mr. Nanjivell has you up before Squire Tresawna, you'll all swear to it in league." Again she turned to Nicky. "Struck your head, did you?—fallin' against the cupboard, when they was huntin' for your money: which they can't deny. Did you *want* Mr. Pamphlett to find your money?"

"*Him?*" said Nicky-Nan bitterly. "*Him?* as I wouldn' trust not ha'f so far as a man could fling him by his eyebrows!"

"Well, *I've* got your savin's—'Bert an' me, every bit of it—stowed an' put away where they can't find it, not if they hunted for weeks. I came upstairs to tell about it, and where we've stowed it. Now be you goin' to put 'Bert and me to prison for that?"

"My dear"—Nicky-Nan spread out his hands—"not if you was a thief an' had really stole it, I wouldn'.

But behavin', as you have, like an angel slap out o' Heaven——" He staggered up and confronted Mr. Pamphlett. "Here, you clear out o' this!" he threatened, pointing to the door. "You're done, my billies. Tuck your tails atween your legs an' march!"

"A moment, if you please," put in Mr. Pamphlett suavely. "You will allow that, not being accustomed to little girls and not knowing therefore how a pert child should properly be chastised and brought to book, I have been uncommonly patient with this one. But you are mistaken, the pair of you, in taking this line with me: and your mistake, though it comes from ignorance of the law, may happen to cost you both pretty dearly." He paused, while Nicky-Nan and 'Beida exchanged glances.

"Don't you heed him," said 'Beida encouragingly. He's only gassin' again." But she faced up for a new attack.

"I have reason to believe," continued Mr. Pamphlett, ignoring her and wagging his forefinger at Nicky; "I have evidence going far to convince me that this money of which we are talking is not yours at all: that you never earned it by your own labour, nor inherited it, nor were left it in any legitimate way. In other words, you were just lucky enough to find it."

"What's that to *you*?"

"It concerns me to this extent. By the common law of England all such money, so discovered, belongs to the Crown: though I understand it is usually shared equally among the Crown, the finder, and the lord of the manor on which it was hidden. Therefore by concealing your knowledge of this money you are illegally defrauding His Majesty, and in fact (if you

found it anywhere in Polpier) swindling me, who own the manor rights of Trebursey and Trethake, which together cover every square inch of this town. I bought them from Squire Tresawna these ten years since. And"—he turned upon 'Beida—"anyone who hides, or helps to hide, such money is an accomplice, and may go to prison for it. *Now* what have you to say?"

But Mr. Pamphlett had missed to calculate Nicky-Nan's recklessness and the strength of old hatred.

"'Say'?" Nicky shook with passion. "I say you're tellin' a parcel o' lies you can't prove. Do I step into *your* dam Bank an' ask where you picked up the coin? —No? Well, then, get out o' this an' take your Policeman with 'ee. Fend off, I say!" he snapped, as Rat-it-all touched him by the arm.

"No offence, Mr. Nanjivell," said the Policeman coaxingly. "But merely as between naybours, if I might advise. Mr. Pamphlett is a very powerful gentleman: or, as I might put it better, he has influence, unknown to you or me, an' knowledge——"

"He's a very powerful skunk."

"'Beida! . . . 'Beida!" called a voice from the foot of the stairs. 'Beida, after a start of joy, answered with the Penhaligon war-whoop, as her brother came charging up.

"Have you told him?" burst in young 'Bert, and drew back at gaze, a foot within the threshold.

"Yes, I've told him," answered 'Beida. "No, you needn' stare so," she went on hurriedly, catching him on the edge of confusion. "It'll be all right if you just answer up an' tell the truth. . . . When we was movin' this afternoon, you an' me took Mr. Nanjivell's savin's away, the last thing—didn' we?"

"Then what have you done with them?" thundered Mr. Pamphlett.

"Don't you answer him that," said 'Beida sweetly. "But answer everything else. An' don't you be afraid of him. *I* ben't."

"What d'ee want me to tell?" asked 'Bert, a trifle uneasily.

"Everything: 'cept you may leave out 'Biades. He's but a child o' four, an' don't count."

"Well," said 'Bert, addressing Mr. Pamphlett—and his face, though pale, was dogged—"if 'Beida's willin', I'd as lief get it off my mind. . . . The first thing, sir, was P'liceman Rat-it-all's comin' to me, Tuesday evenin': an' he said to me, 'What be you doin' to occupy yourself as a Boy Scout, now that this here coast-watchin's off?'——"

"I didn' say 'off,'" interrupted Rat-it-all. "I didn' use no such low and incorrect expression. My words was 'Now that this here coast-watchin' has come to a ontimely end.'"

"I dessay that *was* the way you put it," 'Bert admitted. "When you starts talkin' Lun'on, all I can follow is the sense—an' lucky if that."

"Bodmin," corrected Rat-it-all modestly. "I don't pretend to no more than the Provinces as yet: though Lord knows where I may end."

"Get on with the story, boy," Mr. Pamphlett commanded.

"Well, sir, I owned to him that I was left pretty well at a loose end, with nothin' on hand but to think out how to do a Kind Action every day, as is laid down in the Scout Rules: and it may come easy enough to *you*, sir," added 'Bert with unconscious irony, "but *I* got

no invention. An' his manner bein' so friendly, I told him as how I was breakin' my heart for a job. 'Would 'ee like to catch a Spy—a real German one?' says he. 'Get along with 'ee, pullin' my leg!' says I. 'I ben't pullin' your leg,' says he. 'I be offerin' what may turn out to be the chance o' your life, if you're a smart chap an' want promotion.' 'What is it?' said I. 'Well, I mention no names,' said he, 'but you live in the same house with Nicholas Nanjivell.' 'We're turnin' out this week,' said I. 'All the more reason why you should look slippy an' get to work at once,' says he. Then I told him, sir," went on 'Bert, gathering confidence from the sound of his own voice, "'that I was fair sick o' plannin' to do Kind Actions, which was no business of anybody's in War time, and a bad let-down after coast-watchin'. 'But,' said I,"—here he turned upon Nicky-Nan—"'if 'tis a Kind Action for Mr. Nanjivell, I'd as lief do it upon him as upon anybody: for you might almost call him one o' the family,' I said. 'Kind Action?' says he. 'I don't want you to do him no kinder action than to catch him out for a German spy. I name no names,' says he, 'but from information received, he's in the Germans' pay, an' Mrs. Polsue is ready to swear to it.'"

Nicky-Nan gripped his walking-staff and stood erect, as if to spring on Mr. Pamphlett. But of a sudden the enormity of the charge seemed to overcome him, and he passed a hand over his eyes.

"That's the second time," he muttered. "An' me, that—God help me!—scarce bothered myself about its bein' a War at all: bein' otherwise worried, as you'd know, sir." His straight appeal to his inveterate enemy had a dignity more convincing than any

violent repudiation. But Mr. Pamphlett waved it aside.

"Let the boy tell his story. . . . Well, boy, and what was your answer to the constable?"

"I told him," said 'Bert stolidly, "to get along for a silly fat-head. Didn't I, now?" 'Bert appealed to the recipient of that compliment to confirm its textual accuracy.

"He did so," corroborated Rat-it-all. "He is right to that extent. Which it gave me such a poor opinion of the whole Boy Scout movement that I've treated it thenceforth as dirt beneath my feet. There was a time when I thought pretty tolerably of Baden-Powell. But when it comes to fat-heads——"

"But you see, sir," 'Bert went on, "this put me in mind that I'd seen Rat-it-all for two days past behavin' very silly behind walls an' fuzz-bushes, an' 'most always in the wake o' Nicky-Nan—of Mr. Nanjivell, I mean: which I'd set it down that it was a game between 'em, an' Mr. Nanjivell just lendin' hisself for practice, havin' time on his hands. First-along I'd a mind to join in an' read the man one or two Practical Hints out o' the sixpenny book; for worse shadowin' you couldn' see. But when it turned out he was doin' it in earnest against Mr. Nanjivell I allowed as I'd give him a taste o' the real article, which is what they call 'Scoutin' for Scouts,' in the Advanced Course; whereby he called on Mr. Gilbert here, yesterday afternoon; an' Mr. Gilbert's back parlour window bein' open because o' the hot weather, and me bein' behind the water-butt at the corner——"

"You tarnation imp!" exclaimed the builder.

"Which," continued 'Bert stolidly, "he was askin'

if he reckoned by chance th' Old Doctor's House had any secret hidin' places, an' would he oblige the landlord Mr. Pamphlett by comin' along to-morrow an' bringin' a hammer? Which I went straight home an' borryed mother's, an'—an'——"

"An' you've told quite enough," put in 'Beida.

"By no means," objected Mr. Pamphlett. "What have you children done with the money?"

"Oh," said 'Beida wearily, "we're back on the old question, are we?"

But here Nicky-Nan broke in. "Mr. Pamphlett," he said, "you tell that, as landlord, you've a right to walk in an' see to the repairs. Very well. I don't know the law: but I doubt if the law, when I look it up, 'll say that the said landlord has power to bring along a Bobby *and* a Speckilative Builder. It *may* be so, o' course. Anyway, you've taken it so, an' walked in; an' the next thing you'll do is Walk Out." He pointed with his staff to the door. "*Me*—a German spy! Forth the three of 'ee!"

Mr. Pamphlett saw no way but to comply. "You will hear more of this, Nanjivell," he threatened, turning about in the doorway.

"Gas, again!" said 'Beida. Nicky-Nan stood silent, pointing. The retreat was not dignified.

"But, o' course," said 'Beida, "the bottom of it all was 'Biades."

"'Biades?"

"He'd caught up with some chatter about your bein' a spy. Oh, bless your soul, *everybody's* talkin' about it!" she assured Nicky-Nan cheerfully. "But little pitchers have the longest ears; an' mother an' me

bein' so busy with the packin', he got ahead of us. He's a clivver child, too, but"—'Beida shook her head—"I'm harried in mind about 'en. Quite in a tricksy way he wormed it out o' mother what a spy was, an' how the way to go to work was to s'arch his cupboards; an' then quick as snuff he started 'pon yours, not sayin' a word to anybody. Pretty clivver for four years old—an' what's clivverer, he found the money too!"

"Damn the young viper! . . . No, I asks your pardon. Bless his tender heart, I s'pose I ought to say, seein' as how providential——"

"You can put it which way you like. I dessay God A'mighty has the right an' wrong of it clear; an' 'Bert an' I allowed we'd leave 'Biades to a Higher Power after we'd made him sensible, on the seat of his breeches, of the way his conduc' appealed to us. For I take shame to own it, Mr. Nanjivell, but at sight o' that boundless gold Satan whispered in the poor mite's ear, an' he started priggin'. . . . The way we found it out was, he came home from Mrs. Pengelly's stinkin' o' peppermints: an' when we nosed him an' asked how he came to be favoured so, all he could say on the ground hop was that he'd met a shinin' Angel unexpected in Cobb's Alley: an' the Angel had stopped him and pulled out a purse an' said, 'Alcibiades Penhaligon, the Lord has been much interested of late in your goin's-out an' your comin's-in, an' what a good boy you've a-been. Here is 2d. for you in gold o' the purest water. Go thou an' carry it to Our good friend Missis Pengelly, who will doubtless reckernise and exchange it in peppermint cushions.' Which was too thin. So we were forced to beat him till the truth came out. An' then he brought us here, an' showed what he'd a-found:

an' with the furnitcher movin' an' mother so busy, 'Bert and I managed the rest. We weren't goin' to let that Pamphlett snatch it. If you'll come around by Aun' Bunney's back-garden into Mother's kitchen you shall count it out, every penny."

"'Bert," said Nicky-Nan after a pause, "you've done a Kind Action this day, if you never do another."

"But the clivverness started with 'Biades," insisted 'Beida. "I hope you'll bear that in mind, though I say nothing against the child's sinfulness."

"You're the best friends, all three, I ever met in this world," said Nicky-Nan gratefully.

On his homeward road, and half-way up the hill, Mr. Pamphlett at the same moment turned, looked aloft, and accused Providence.

"What blisters me," said Mr. Pamphlett to the welkin, "is the thought that I subscribed no less than two guineas to the Boy Scouts Movement!"

CHAPTER XXIII

ENLIGHTENMENT, AND RECRUITING

"Was there ever a woman on this earth so tried?" demanded Mrs. Penhaligon, lifting her eyes to two hams and a flitch of bacon she had just suspended from the rafters, and invoking them as Cleopatra the injurious gods. "As if 'twasn' enough to change the best kitchen in all Polpier for quarters where you can't swing a cat, but on top of it I must be afflicted with a child that's taken wi' the indoors habit; and in the middle of August month, too, when everyone as means to grow up a comfort to all concerned is out stretchin' his legs an' makin' himself scarce an' gettin' a breath o' nice fresh air into his little lungs."

"What's lungs?" asked 'Biades.

"There was a boy in the south of Ireland somewhere," his mother answered, collecting a few wash-cloths she had hung to dry on the door of the cooking apparatus, "as took to his bed with nothing the matter at the age o' fourteen. Next day, when his mother called him to get up, he said he wasn't took very well. An' this went on, day after day, until now he's forty years old an' the use of his limbs completely gone from him. That's a fact, for I read it on the newspaper with names an' dates, and only three nights ago I woke up dreamin' upon that poor woman, workin' her fingers to the bone an' saddled with a bed-riding son. Little did I think at the time——" Mrs. Penhaligon broke off and sighed between desperation and absent-mindedness.

"I like this stove," answered 'Biades. "It's got a shiny knob on the door, 'stead of a latch."

"How the child does take notice! . . . Yes, a nice shiny knob it is, and if you won't come out to the back-yard an' watch while I pin these things on the clothes-line, you must stay here an' study your disobedient face in it. The fire's out, so you can't tumble in an' be burnt to a coal like the wicked children in Nebuchadnezzar: which is a comfort, so far as it goes. Nor I can't send you out to s'arch for your sister, wi' the knowledge that it'll surely end in her warmin' your little sit-upon. . . . I'd do it myself, this moment," —the mother grew wrathful only to relent,—"if I could be sure you weren't sickenin' for something. You're behavin' so unnatural." She eyed him anxiously. "If it should turn out to be a case o' suppressed measles, now, I'd hate to go to my grave wi' the thought that I'd banged 'em in."

So Mrs. Penhaligon, having picked up her clothes, issued forth into the sunlight of the back-yard. 'Biades watched her through the narrow kitchen window. He watched her cunningly.

As soon as he saw her busy with the clothes-pegs, Master 'Biades crept to a small iron door in the wall, a foot or two from the range, and stealthily lifted the latch. The door opened on a deep, old-fashioned oven, disused since the day when the late Mrs. Bunney (misguided woman) had blocked up her open hearth with a fire-new apparatus.

The child peered ("peeked" as they say in Polpier) into the long narrow chamber, so awesomely dark at its far end, and snatched a fearful joy. In that cavity lay the treasure. Gold—untold gold!

He thrust his head into the aperture, and gloated. But it was so deep that even when his eyes became used to the darkness he could see nothing of the hoard. He wanted to gloat more.

Tingling premonitions ran down his small spine; thrills that, reaching the region of the lower vertebræ, developed an almost painful activity. . . . None the less, 'Biades could never tell just how or at what moment his shoulders, hips, legs, found themselves inside the oven; but in they successively went, and he was crawling forward into the pitch-gloom on hands and knees, regretting desperately (and too late) that he had forgotten to sneak a box of matches, when afar behind him he heard a sound that raised every hair on the nape of his young neck—the lifting of the back-door latch and the letting-in of voices.

"You never *did*!" said the voice of 'Bert.

"Leave me to tell her," said the voice of 'Beida. "The way you're goin', she'll have the palpitations afore you begin. . . . Mother, dear—if you'll but take a seat. Is't for the tenth or the twelfth time we'm tellin' 'ee that father's neither killed nor wounded?"

"Then what is it, on earth?" demanded the voice of Mrs. Penhaligon. "An' why should Mr. Nanjivell be followin' you, of all people? An' where's my blessed latest, that has been a handful ever since you two left me, well knowin' the straits I'm put to?"

"If I'm introodin', ma'am——" said the voice of Nicky-Nan.

"Oh, no . . . not at all, Mr. Nanjivell!—so long as you realise how I'm situated. . . . An' whoever left that oven door open, I'll swear I didn't."

'Beida stepped swiftly to the oven, swung the door

wide enough to allow a moment's glance within, and shut with a merciless clang.

She lifted her voice. "Mebbe," she announced, "'twas I that left it on the hasp before runnin' out. I was thinkin' what a nice oven 'twas, an' how much better if you wanted to make heavy-cake in a hurry, to celebrate our movin'-in. 'Bert agreed with me when I told him," she continued, still lifting her voice, "and unbeknown to you we cut an' fetched in a furze-bush, there bein' nothin' to give such a savour to bread, cake, or pie. So if you're willin', Mother, we'll fire it up while Mr. Nanjivell tells his business."

"What's *that*?" asked Mrs. Penhaligon, sitting erect, as her ears caught the sound of a howl, muffled but prolonged.

'Beida set her back firmly against the oven. "Bread takes longer than cakes," she announced, making her voice carry. "Cakes is soonest over. We might try the old place first with a heavy cake, if Mr. Nanjivell don't mind waitin' for a chat, an' will excuse the flavour whatever it turns out."

"We're bewitched!" cried Mrs. Penhaligon starting to her feet as the wailing was renewed, with a faint tunding on the iron door.

'Beida flung it open. "Which I hope it has been a lesson to you," she began, thrusting herself quickly in front of the aperture, and heading off the culprit before he could clamber out and run to his mother's lap. "No, you don't! The first thing *you* have to do, to show you're sorry, is to creep back all the way you can go, an' fetch forth what you can find at the very end."

"You won't shut the door on me again?" pleaded 'Biades.

"That depends on how slippy you look. I make no promises," answered 'Beida sternly. "'Twas you that first stole Mr. Nanjivell's money, and if you ben't doin' it again, well I can only say as appearances be against him—eh, 'Bert?"

"Fetch it out, you varmint!" 'Bert commanded.

"But I don't understand a word of this!" protested the mother. "My precious worm! What for be you two commandin' him to wriggle up an' down an oven on his tender little belly like a Satan in Genesis, when all the time I thought he'd taken hisself off like a good boy, to run along an' mess his clothes 'pon the Quay. . . . Come 'ee forth, my cherub, an' tell your mother what they've a-been doin' to 'ee? . . . Eh? Why, what's that you've a-got clinched in your hand?"

"Sufferin's!" sobbed 'Biades, still shaken by an aftergust of fright.

"*What?*"

"Sufferin's!" echoed 'Beida excitedly. "Real coined an' golden sufferin's! Unclinch your hand, 'Biades, an' show the company!"

As the child opened his palm, Mrs. Penhaligon fell back, and put out a hand against the kitchen table for support.

"The good Lord in Heaven behear us! . . . Whose money be this, an' where dropped from?"

"There's piles of it——" panted 'Beida.

"Lashin's of it——" echoed 'Bert.

"An' it all belongs to Mr. Nanjivell, that we used to call Nicky-Nan, an' wonder if we could get a pair o' father's old trousers on to him with a little tact—an' him all the while as rich as Squire Tresawna!"

"—Rich as Squire Tresawna an' holy Solomon rolled

into one," corroborated 'Bert, nodding vigorously. "Pinch it 'tween your fingers, mother, if you won't believe."

But to her children's consternation Mrs. Penhaligon, after a swift glance at the gold, turned about on Nicky-Nan as he backed shamefacedly to the doorway, and opened on him the vials of unintelligible fury.

"What d'ee mean by it?" she demanded. "As if I hadn' suffered enough in mind a'ready, but you must come pokin' money into my oven and atween me an' my children! Be you mad, or only wicked? Or is it witchcraft you'd be layin' on us? . . . Take up your gold, however you came by it, an' fetch your shadow off my doorstep, or I'll——" She advanced on poor Nicky-Nan, who backed out to the side gate and into the lane before her wrath, and found himself of a sudden taken on both flanks: on the one by Mrs. Climoe, who had spied upon his visit and found her malicious curiosity too much for her; on the other by gentle old Mr. Hambly returning from a stroll along the cliffs.

"Hallo! Tut—tut—what is this?" exclaimed Mr. Hambly. "A neighbours' quarrel, and between folks I know to be so respectworthy? . . . Oh, come now —come, good souls!"

"A little nigher than naybours, Minister," put in Mrs. Climoe. "That is if you had eyes an' ears in your head."

Nicky-Nan swung about on her: but she rested a hand on either hip and was continuing. "'Naybours,' you said, sir? 'Naybours'? Him accused by public talk for a German spy——"

"Hush, Mrs. Climoe! Of all the Commandments, ma'am, the one most in lack of observance hereabouts,

to my observation, is that which forbids bearing false witness against a neighbour. To a charitable mind that includes hasty witness."

"There's another, unless I disremember," snapped Mrs. Climoe, "that forbids 'ee to covet your neighbour's wife."

While Mr. Hambly sought for a gentle reproof for this, Mrs. Penhaligon, pale of face, rested a hand against her gate-post, and said she very gently but in a white scorn:

"What is this talk of naybours, quarrelin' or comfortin' or succourin' or bearin' witness? There be naybours, an'"—she pointed a finger at Mrs. Climoe—"there be livers-by. Now stroll along, the lot of 'ee, and annoy somebody else that lives unprotected!"

She said it so quietly and decisively, standing motionless, that Lippity-Libby, coming around the corner of the lane with paste-pot and brush, and with a roll of bills tucked in his armpit, mistook the group for a chance collection of cheerful gossips. He drew up, lowered his pail, and began in a business-like way to slap paste upon the upper flap of a loft-door across the way, chatting the while over his shoulder.

"Good evenin', naybours! Now what (says you to yourselves) might I be carryin' here under my arm in the cool o' the day. Is it a By-Law? No, it is not a By-Law. Or is it a Tender? No, it is not a Tender. Or is it a Bankrup' Stock, or a Primrose Feet, or at the worst a Wesleyan Anniversary? Or peradventure is it a Circus? . . . Sold again! 'Tis a Recruitin' Meetin', an' for Saturday."

Having slapped on the paste, he unfolded a bill and eyed it critically.

"'Your King and Country Want You.'—That's pretty good for Polpier, eh? Flatterin', one might almost say."

His cheerfulness held the group with their passions arrested. Nicky-Nan turned about and stared at the placard as Lippity-Libby smoothed it over the paste, whistling.

At that moment Un' Benny Rowett, hands in trouser-pockets, came dandering along. He, too, taking the geniality of everyone for granted, halted, spread his legs wide and conned the announcement.

"Oh!" said he after a pause, wheeling about. "Still harpin' on they Germans? Well, Mr. Hambly, sir, I don't know how it strikes you, but I'm sick an' tired of them dismal blackguards."

"I can't bear it," said Mrs. Steele, walking to and fro in her drawing-room. She ceased wringing her handkerchief, and came to a halt confronting the Vicar, who stood moodily leaning an arm on the mantelshelf.

"I believe," he answered after a pause, "you would find it worse to bear in a month or so if I hadn't offered."

"Why didn't you consult me?"

"I wrote to the Bishop——"

"The 'Bishop'! Well . . . what did *he* advise?"

"Oh, of course he temporised. . . . Yes, I know what you are going to say. My consulting him was a momentary throw-back of loyalty. The official Churches—Roman Catholic, Greek, Anglican, the so-called Free—are alike out of it in this business. Men in England, France, Russia—Germany and Austria, too—are up against something that really matters."

"What can matter comparable with the saving of a soul?"

"Losing it, sweetheart; or, better still, forgetting it—just seeing your job and sticking it out. It is a long, long way to Tipperary, every Tommy knows; and what (bless him!) he neither knows nor recks about is its being a short cut to Heaven."

"Robert, will you tell me that our Faith is going down in this horrible business?"

"Certainly not, my dear. But I seem to see that the Churches are going down. After all, every Church —even the Church Catholic—is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Where I've differed from four out of five of my clerical brethren (oh, drat the professional lingo!)—from the majority of the clergy hereabouts, is that while they look on the Church and its formularies as something even more sacred than the Cross itself, I have believed in it as the most effective instrument for teaching the Cross." Mr. Steele pulled a wry mouth. "At this moment I seem to be the bigger fool. They *may* be right: the Church *may* be worth a disinterested idolatry: but as a means to teach mankind the lesson of Christ it has rather patently failed to do its business. Men are not fools: or rather they *are* fools, but not fools enough in the long run to pay for being taught to be foolish. They pay us ministers of religion, Agatha, a tidy lot of money, if you take all Europe over: and we are not delivering the goods. In their present frame of mind they will soon be discovering that, for any use we are, they had better have saved the cash and put it into heavy artillery."

"All we have lived, worked, hoped for in this parish—we two, almost alone——"

"And now," said the Vicar ruefully. "I am leaving you quite alone. Yes, you have a right to reproach me. . . . Old Pritchard, from St. Martin's, will take the duty. His Vicar will be only too glad to get rid of him."

"Oh, don't let us talk of that silly old man!" said Mrs. Steele impatiently. "And as for reproaches, Robert, I have only one for you—that you did this without consulting me."

"Yes, I know: but you see, Agatha——"

"No, I do not see." She faced him, her eyes swimming. "I might have argued a little—have cried a little. But why—oh, why, Robert?—did you deny me the pride to say in the end, 'Go, and God bless you'?"

The Recruiting Meeting was held in the Council Schoolroom, on Saturday evening, at 7 o'clock. [Public meetings in Polpier are invariably fixed for Saturday, that being the one week-night when the boats keep home.] Schoolmaster Rounsell and his daughter (back from her holiday) had decorated the room, declining outside assistance. It was a rule of life with Schoolmaster Rounsell and his daughter to be very stiff against all outside assistance. They took the line that as State-employed teachers of the young,—that is to say, Civil Servants,—they deserved more social respect than Polpier habitually showed them. In this contention, to be sure, they were wholly right. Their mistake lay in supposing that in this dear land of ours prejudice can be removed by official decree, or otherwise than by the slow possession of patience, tact, and address. Mr. Rounsell, however, was less stiff than usual, since the Vicar had asked him to second a vote of thanks at the

end of the meeting. He and his daughter spent a great part of the afternoon in arranging the platform and decorating the back wall with a Union Jack, two or three strings of cardpaper-flags that had not seen the light since Coronation Day, and a wall-map of Europe with a legend below it in white calico letters upon red Turkey twill,—"DO GOOD AND FEAR NOT." It had served to decorate many occasions and was as appropriate to this as to any of them.

By 6.45 the room was crowded with an audience numbering two hundred and more. They sat very quietly in the odour of the evil-smelling oil lamps, expectant of oratory. For Squire Tresawna (who pleaded an attack of gout as an excuse for not attending) had not only assured the committee of his personal sympathy, but at his own cost had engaged a speaker recommended by a political association (now turned non-political) in London. There was promise of oratory, and every Cornish audience loves oratory.

In the Squire's absence Farmer Best took the chair. Punctually at seven o'clock he mounted the platform, followed by the orator from London (a florid gentleman in a frock-coat and dingy white waistcoat), the Vicar, Mr. Hambly, Mr. Pamphlett, Dr. Mant, and Mr. Rounsell. As they entered, Miss Rounsell, seated at the piano at the far end of the platform, struck the opening chords of "God Save the King." It seemed to take the audience by surprise: but they shuffled to their feet and, after a few bars, sang the anthem very creditably.

When they had settled themselves, Farmer Best opened the meeting.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Naybours all," he said,—

"I don't suppose these here proceedin's will conclude much afore ten o'clock: after which it'll take me the best part of an hour to get home; an' what with one thing and another I doubt it'll be far short o' midnight afore my missus gets me to bed. Whereby, knowin' my habits, you'll see that I reckon this to be summat more than an ord'nary occasion: the reason' bein', as you know, that pretty well the hull of Europe's in a state o' War: which, when such a thing happens, it behoves us. I'll say no more than that, as Britons, it behoves us. It was once said by a competent observer that Britons never, never — if Miss Rounsell will oblige?"

This was a rehearsed effect. Miss Rounsell, taking her cue, struck the key-board, and as Miss Charity Oliver (in the front row) testified next morning, "the effect was electric." All sprang to their feet and sang the chorus of "Rule, Britannia"! till the windows shook.

"Thank 'ee, friends," continued Farmer Best, as the tumult and the singers subsided. "There's no more to say but that most of' ee's heard tell, in one way or another at some time of his life, of Armygeddon. Well, this here's *of* it; an' if you ask my opinion o' that fellow they call the Kaiser, I say I wouldn' sleep in his bed for a million o' money. And with these few remarks I will no longer stand between 'ee and Mr. Boult, who is a speaker all the way from London, an' will no doubt give us a treat an' persuade many of our young friends in front to join up."

Mr. Boult arose amid violent applause. He pulled the lapels of his frock-coat together. He spoke, and from the first moment it was clear that he held at

command all the tricks of the hired orator. He opened with an anecdote from the life of President Garfield, and a sentimental application that made the Vicar wince. He went on to point out, not unimpressively, that Armageddon ("as you, sir, have so aptly and so strikingly termed it") had actually broken upon the world. Farmer Best, flattered by this acknowledgment of copyright in the word, smiled paternally.

"It has burst like a thunderstorm upon the fields of Belgium; but the deluge it discharges is a deluge of blood intermingled with human tears. And where, my friends, is Belgium? How far distant lie these trodden and wasted fields, these smoking villages, these harvests where men's bodies crush the corn and their blood pollutes the food they planted to sustain it? Listen: those fields lie nearer London than does your little village: men are dying—yes, and women and little children are being massacred—far nearer London than you are peacefully sitting at this moment."

"Come!" thought the Vicar, "this fellow is talking sense after all, and talking it rather well." Mr. Rounsell stood up and pointed out the positions of Liège and Polpier on the wall-map, and their relative distances from London.

A moment later the Vicar frowned again as Mr. Boult launched into a violent—and as it turned out, a lengthy—invective against the German Emperor; with the foulness of whose character and designs he had, it seemed, been intimately acquainted for a number of years. "Who made the War?" "Who had been planning it and spying for the opportunity to gratify his unbridled lust of power?" "Who would stand arraigned for it before the awful tribunal of God?"

etc. The answer was "the Kaiser," "the Kaiser," "the Kaiser Wilhelm"—Mr. Boult pronounced the name in German and threw scorn into it.

—"Which," mused the Vicar, "is an argument *ad invidiam*; and, when one comes to think of it, rather a funny one. The man is still talking sense, though: only I wish he'd talk it differently."

Then for a quarter of an hour Mr. Boult traced the genesis of the War, with some ability but in special-pleader style and without a particle of fairness. He went on to say that he, personally, was not in favour of Conscription. [As a matter of fact he had spoken both for and against Compulsory Service on many public platforms.] He believed in the Voluntary Principle: and looking on the many young men gathered in the body of the hall, and more particularly at the back ["excellent material" he called them, too], he felt convinced there would be no hanging back that night; but to-morrow, or, rather, Monday, when he returned to London he would be able to report that the heart of Polpier was sound and fired with a resolve to serve our common country. Mr. Boult proceeded to make the Vicar writhe in his seat by a jocular appeal to "the young ladies in the audience" not to walk-out with any young man until he had clothed himself in khaki. He wound up with one of his most effective perorations, boldly enlisting John Bright and the Angel of Death; and sat down amid tumultous applause. It takes all sorts to make a world, and this kind of speech.

Farmer Best called upon the Vicar.

"I wish," said Mr. Steele, "to add just a word or two to emphasise one particular point in Mr. Boult's speech; or, rather, to put it in a somewhat different

light. And I shall be brief, lest I spoil the general effect on your minds of his very powerful appeal.

"I address myself to the women in this room. . . . With *you* the last word lies, as it rightly should. It is to *you* that husband, son, brother, wooer, will turn for the deciding voice to say, 'Go, help to save England—and may God prosper and guard you'; because it is your heart that makes the sacrifice, as it is your image the man will carry away with him; because the England he goes to defend shapes itself in his mind as 'home,' as the one most sacred spot, though it be but a cottage, in which his imagination or his memory installs you as queen; in which your presence reigns, or is to reign.

"Do you realise your strength, O ye women? . . . The age of chivalry is not dead. Nothing so noble that has once so nobly taken hold of men's minds can ever die, though the form of it may change. Now the doctrine of chivalry was this, for the Man and the Woman—

"For the man, that every true soldier went forth as a knight:

> And no quarrell a knight he ought to take
> But for a Truth or for a Woman's sake.

And our soldiers to-day fight for both: for the truth that Right is better than Might, and for the sake of every woman who reigns or shall reign in an English home; that not only shall she be safeguarded from the satyr and the violator, but that she shall be secured in every inch of dignity she has known in our days; as queen at the hearth where her children obey her, and in her doorway to which the merchants of all the earth bring their wares.

"For the Woman, chivalry taught that she, who cannot herself fight, is always the Queen of Tournay,

the president of the quarrel, the arbitress between the righteous and the unrighteous cause, the dispenser of reward to him who fights the good fight. . . . So, and as each one of you is the braver to speak the word—'Go, though it break my heart: and God bring you safely home to me!'—she shall with the heavenlier right tender her true soldier his crown when he returns and kneels for a blessing on his victory."

When the speeches were ended and Farmer Best arose to invite intending recruits to step up to the platform, Mr. Boult had an unhappy inspiration. "If you'll excuse me, Mr. Chairman," he suggested, "there's a way that I tried this day week in Holloway with great effect. . . . I take out my watch an' count ten, very slowly, giving the young men the chance who shall rush up before the counting is over. It acted famously at Holloway."

"Oh, very well," said Farmer Best doubtfully, taken off his guard. "The gen'leman from London," he announced, "will count ten slowly, an' we're to watch out what happens. He says it acted very well at Holloway last week."

On the instant, as Mr. Boult drew out his watch, the audience hushed itself, as for a conjuring séance. Mr. Hambly passed a hand over his brow, and sighed.

"One—two—three—" counted Mr. Boult, and a mortuary silence descended on all.

"—four—five—six—seven—"

"Pray on, brother Boult! 'Tis workin', 'tis workin'," squeaked up a mock-religious voice from the back.

Someone tittered audibly, and the strain broke in a general shout of laughter. Old men, up to now profoundly serious, lay back and held their sides. Old women leaned forward and searched for their handker-

chiefs, their bonnets nodding. Mr. Boult pocketed his watch, and under his breath used ferocious language.

"I don't wonder!" said Farmer Best with a forced attempt at sympathy. Then he, too, broke down and cast himself back in his chair haw-hawing.

There was a sudden stir in the crowd at the back, and young Obed Pearce came thrusting his way through the press.

"Well—I don't care who laughs, but I'm *one*!" growled young Obed, half defiantly, half sullenly, and tossed his cap on to the platform like a challenger in a wrestling ring.

"And I'm another!" announced the clear quiet voice of Seth Minards, thrilling the room as the hush fell.

"Aw, 'tis Seth!" "Seth's a beautiful speaker once he gets goin'." "But what's the meanin'?" "Seth, of all the boys!" "Let Seth speak!"

"Ha! What did I promise you?" proclaimed Mr. Boult triumphantly, reaching down a hand. "Here, clamber up to the platform, my lad, an' give 'em a talk. . . . You can talk, they're saying. Strike while the iron's hot."

Seth took his hand and vaulted to the platform; but dropped it on the instant and turned to the meeting. "I come here, friends," he announced, "because Mr. Obed's offered himself, an' I don't see no way but I must go too. . . . That's it: I don't agree wi' the ha'af that's been said to-night, but I don't see no other way. We've got to go, because—" his voice sank here, as though he were communing with himself: it could scarcely be heard, "—because—" he swung about upon the elders on the platform and swept them with an accusing finger. "We've got to go because *you've*

brought this thing about, or have let it come about! It don't matter to *me*, much. . . . But we've to wipe up the mess: an' if the young men must go an' wipe it up, an' if for them there's never to be bride-ale nor children, 'tis your doin' an' the doin' o' your generation all over Europe. A pretty tale, too, when up to a fortni't ago your talk was o' peace an' righteousness! . . . Forgi'e me, Mr. Best . . . I'll fight well enough, maybe, when it comes to't. But *why* were we brought up one way, to be tortured turnin' our conscience to another?"

There were no other recruits. "A great disappointment," said Mr. Boult. "That earnest young fool spoilt it all."

"He made the best speech of the evening," answered the Vicar.

"Well, anyway he's enlisted. He'll find the Army a fine discipline for the tongue."

"Indeed," said the Vicar viciously. "I did not know that you had experience of the Service."

As Seth Minards thrust his way out of the insufferably stuffy room, in the porchway he felt a hand laid on his shoulder; and, turning about, recognised Nicky-Nan by the dim starlight.

"God bless 'ee, my son!" said Nicky heartily, to his utter surprise. "I can't stay to talk now, havin' to force my way in an' catch Dr. Mant. But maybe we'll both be seein' this War from to-morrow; an' maybe we'll meet in it, or maybe we will not. But you've let in light 'pon an older skull than your own; an' I thank 'ee, an' I'll pray th' Almighty every night on my knees that you may fight well an' be preserved through it all, to come home an' testify."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIRST THREE

MR. PAMPHLETT had breakfasted, and had gone upstairs to put on his frock-coat and array himself for Divine service.

The servant girl announced Mr. Nanjivell.

"Sorry to trouble 'ee, sir, and upon such a day," said Nicky Nan, drawing up his sound leg to "attention," as his enemy entered the parlour: "but my business won't wait. I saw Doctor Mant after the meetin' last night, an' this mornin' I was up early an' had a talk wi' the Minister—wi' Mr. Hambly. The upshot is, that time presses."

"I do not usually discuss business on the Sabbath," said Mr. Pamphlett stiffly.

"O' course not. Who would?" Nicky-Nan agreed. "But the upshot is that you an' me havin' been not what you might call friends——"

"I am due at Divine service in less than an hour. State your business," commanded Mr. Pamphlett.

"And I am due away, sir, in about that time. Will you look at this paper?" Nicky-Nan laid on the table a half-sheet of notepaper scribbled over with figures in pencil. "Look over that, if you please; or put it off till you come back from Chapel, if you will: but by that time I shall be gone. You'll find my address in Plymouth at the foot."

"If you'd kindly explain——"

"Mrs. Penhaligon has the money. I've spoke to Dr. Mant: who says I can be put right, an' the operation, with board and lodging, will be covered by ten pound. I've taken ten pound, as accounted for on the paper."

Mr. Pamphlett picked up the paper, and felt for his pince-nez.

"Still I don't understand."

"No, you wouldn't. I'm *trustin'* 'ee—that's what it comes to. I've had a talk with Mr. Hambly besides; and he and Dr. Mant'll look after my interests. . . . You see, I *did* find a hoard o' money in the Old Doctor's House, an' stuck to it, not knowin' the law. On the paper, too, you'll see what I've used of it—every penny accounted for. Mr. Hambly says that anyway the law gives me a share far beyond anything I've used. So I leave it atween 'ee, to see fair play for me if ever I come back. If I don't, I've left it to the Penhaligon children; an' Mr. Hambly an' Dr. Mant'll see fair play for them. . . . But you understand, sir"—Nicky-Nan dived into his left trouser-pocket and showed a palmful of coins—"I've taken ten pound, for the operation an' sundries."

Mr. Pamphlett studied the paper for a moment.

"But, my good man—since you say that you have taken Mr. Hambly into your confidence——"

"Well, sir?"

"Oh, well—you will be back, doubtless, in a few days' time; and then we can talk. This—this is very—er—honest of you."

"It may be. As for bein' back in a few days' time, if the War should be over in a few days' time you may expect me. I hope it won't. God forgive me for sayin'

so, but I'll be more comfortable there. . . . Ay, d'ee hear me, Mr. Pamphlett? More *comfortable* than here amidst women's tongues, an' clerkly men's devices, an', what's worse, even the set-up whisperin' o' children. God forgive 'em an' forgive *you*! I'm a Polpier man, an' the last o' my stock; but I'll come back, if at all, to finish in Polpier with credit."

"This represents a considerable sum of money," said Mr. Pamphlett, conning the paper, and with a note, which he could not suppress, of elation in his voice.

"Ay; does it not?" said Nicky-Nan scornfully. "Well, I leave 'ee at home, to prove how honest you can contrive to be with it. D'ee *see*? . . . There's boys, like your nephew, young Obed Pearce, as goes to fight for their conscience; an' there's boys, like young Seth Minards, as goes to fight despite their conscience; but for me, that am growin' elderly, I go, maybe with a touch o' the old country, in contempt o' my kind."

Mr. Pamphlett had seated himself at the table, and with his golden pencil-holder was at work on the paper making calculations. Nicky-Nan, going out, turned in the doorway and lifted his hand to the old remembered naval salute.

A couple of hours later, having given them a two-miles' lift on the way, Nicky-Nan at the cross-roads dropped young Seth and young Obed to take their way to the inland barracks. He was for the coast-road, with the hospital and the operating-theatre at the end of it. If Heaven willed, he might eventually be of some service on the heave of the sea, as they in their youth and their strength assuredly would be in the land campaign.

As his hired trap jolted on, at a twist of the road

before it bore straight-eastwardly, he caught sight of their diminishing figures side by side and already a goodish way off on a rise of the inland road. It did not occur to them to turn on the chance of sighting him and waving a hand. The two were comrades already, sharing talk, on this their first stage towards the battlefields of Flanders.

THE END

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Anstey's Baboo Jabberjee, 57

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Bell's Dancing Days, 82
Belloc's Historic Thames, 34
Belloc-Lowndes' The Heart of Penelope, 41
Bennett's Grand Babylon Hotel, 4
Bennett's City of Pleasure, 38
Besant and Rice's Chaplain of the Fleet, 18
Betham-Edwards's Under the German Ban, 66
Bindloss's Concession Hunters, 103
Bindloss's Mistress of Bonaventure, 39

Capes's Jay of Italy, 71
Castle's Pride of Jennico, 70
Chesterton's The Defendant, 12
Conrad's Shadow Line, 122
Conrad's The Rescue, 123
Conrad's 'Twixt Land and Sea, 13
Conrad's Within the Tides, 106
Converse's Children of Light, 53
Cooke's Dual Alliance and Titania, 111
Cornford's Master Beggars of Belgium, 63
Cornford's Black Watch, 73
Courtney's Rosemary's Letter Book, 79
Crockett's Black Douglas, 77
Crockett's Red Axe, 105

Daudet's Kings in Exile, 56
Dickens's Christmas Carol, 64
Dickens's Cricket on the Hearth, 65
Dobson's Eighteenth Century Essays, 35
Durrant's Cross and Dagger, 130

Ferguson's Janey Canuck in the West, 95
Ferguson's Open Trails, 72
Fogazzaro's Saint, 97

Gardiner's Prophets, Priests and Kings, 23
Gardiner's Leaves in the Wind, 121
Gardiner's Pillars of Society, 92
Gardiner's Pebbles on the Shore, 94
Gardiner's Windfalls, 124
Gardiner's Many Furrows, 125
Gibbon's Adventures of Miss Gregory, 6
Gissing's Demos, 74

Hewlett's Fool Errant, 15
Hobbes's Serious Wooing, 83
Hobbes's Dream and the Business, 99
Hudson's Afoot in England, 127

Jackson's Southward Ho! 46
Jepson's Lady Noggs, 101
Lamb's Essays of Elia, 10
Lawrence's Pilgrimage, 50
Lee's Widow Woman, 20
Lee's Our Little Town, 129

Milne's Epistle of Atkins, 47

O'Grady's In the Wake of King James, 78
Osborne's Letters to Sir Wm. Temple, 11
Oxenham's Rising Fortunes, 89

Pain's De Omnibus, 45
Parker's Ladder of Swords, 62
Pasture's Lonely Lady of Grosvenor Square, 43
Paul's Queen Ann, 58
Pickthall's Valley of Kings, 51
Princess Priscilla's Fortnight, by the Author of "Elizabeth and her German Garden," 42

Quiller-Couch's Troy Town, 9
Quiller-Couch's Delectable Duchy, 69
Quiller-Couch's Blue Pavilions, 128

Ridge's Wickhamses, 40
Russell's Selected Essays, 22
Russell's (Clark) Round the Galley Fire, 48

Sanger's Seventy Years a Showman, 126
Sheldon's Bubble Fortune, 14
Shorter's Brontës and their Circle, 36
Shorter's George Borrow, 102
Sidgwick's Professor's Legacy, 5
Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis? 44
Spender's Comments of Bagshot, 59
Stacpoole's Pools of Silence, 27
Steuart's Cupid, V.C., 87
Steuart's Minister of State, 98
Steuart's Rock of the Ravens, 104
Stevenson's St. Ives, 37
Stockton's Rudder Grange, 33

Twain's (Mark) Innocents Abroad, 21

Various Authors, A Modern Miscellany, 131

Walker's Coldstream Guards, 86
Walker's Seaforth Highlanders, 80
Walpole's The Wooden Horse, 30
Ward's Eleanor, 90
Watson's (Marriott), Rosalind in Arden 31
Watson's (Marriott), Privateers, 76
Watson's (Marriott), Once Upon a Time, 48
Wells's The Wheels of Chance, 2
Wells's The Wonderful Visit, 25
Weyman's Shrewsbury, 7
Weyman's Abbess of Vlaye, 19
Weyman's Castle Inn, 32
Weyman's Chippinge, 68
Weyman's Long Night, 91
Weyman's Starvecrow Farm, 100
Whiteing's No. 5 John Street, 29
Wilson's (President) New Freedom, 85

Zangwill's Children of the Ghetto, 28
Zangwill's Grandchildren of the Ghetto, 61

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